

Communications and Mobility

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The Migrant, the Mobile Phone,
and the Container Box

David Morley

WILEY Blackwell

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In celebration of the indefatigable spirit of Flaubert's multidisciplinary encyclopedists Bouvard and Pécuchet, in whose footsteps I seem to have been trudging for many years now.

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Introduction

Redefining Communications

The book before you covers a wide range of topics only some of which will be familiar to media and communications scholars. It is a synthetic text that aims to bring together perspectives from media studies, science and technology studies, transport studies, sociology, and cultural geography on questions of mobility, territory, communication, and transport in the contemporary world. It is, by intention, programmatic and often takes an exhortatory tone: my objective is to persuade the reader that a number of critical issues in the field of contemporary culture and politics will be better understood if this broader interdisciplinary perspective is brought to bear on the questions at stake. To this end, the text is replete with indicative examples from a variety of fields, by means of which I hope to demonstrate the kind of benefits to be had from the perspective on offer here.

As is explained at more length in Chapter 1, my ambition is to redefine the agenda of media and communications studies and, in particular, to (re)expand the definition of communications so as to once again include within it (as was historically the case) the realms of material mobility, transport, and geography. Thus, in many places, I invoke the phraseology of geopolitics, power, and territory – although of course, the territories of concern are now both material and virtual, online and off. Against the utopian futurism of much research in the field, which focuses primarily on the virtual, I am concerned to restore the material dimension to the analysis by considering how these two dimensions of geography are now articulated with each other in increasingly complex modes of symbiosis.

By way of establishing a broader theoretical framework within which the book's particular arguments can be understood, I spell out below some of the presumptions, commitments and perspectives which have guided its writing.

To some extent, my approach can be defined negatively in terms of the critiques of Mediacyentrism, Eurocentrism, and Cultural Presentism, which I have articulated elsewhere.¹ More positively, I am concerned to bring together the European and North American materialist traditions of communications

theory represented by Armand Mattelart, Yves de la Haye, Harold Innis, James Carey, and John Durham Peters² in combination with perspectives offered by the “new mobilities” paradigm,³ alongside work in transnational studies,⁴ cultural geography,⁵ and transport studies.⁶ To put it polemically, my approach represents the opposite of what I regard as the technologically determinist forms of “new media” theory as represented by the work of scholars such as Freidrich Kittler, Scott Lash, and Lev Manovich.⁷ Let me now explicate that set of perspectives a little more fully before proceeding to the more particular agenda of the book’s later chapters.

Technological Determinism and Contextualism

We are often told that, under the impact of the new technologies of our globalized age, we live in an increasingly borderless world characterized by unprecedented rates of technological change and mobility, and new modes of time–space compression. In many versions of the story of globalization, we are offered an abstracted sociology of the postmodern, inhabited by an uninterrogated “we,” who “nowadays” live in an undifferentiated global world, whose lives are increasingly determined by the (seemingly automatic) effects of the new media. However, the technologically determinist nature of these claims flies in the face of a great deal of audience research since the mid-1980s, which has demonstrated the complex and variable ways in which media technologies are interpreted and mobilized by their users. My own view is that, rather than accepting these generalizing and abstracted approaches, we need to understand how a variety of media technologies, both new and old, are fitted into, and come to function within, different cultural contexts.

That kind of “contextualist” approach to questions of technological change is defined by Jennifer Bryce as one in which, rather than starting with the internal “essence” of a technology and then attempting to deduce its “effects” from its technical specifications, one begins with an analysis of the interactional system in a particular context and then investigates how any particular technology is fitted into it.⁸ Clearly, while particular technologies do each have their own specific capacities and affordances, no technology has straightforward impacts – not least because one has to begin with the question of which people (differentially) see the potential relevance of any given technology and how they might use it in the specific cultural context of their own lives. This is to argue that context is no “optional extra,” which we might study at the end of the analytic process, but rather, is best seen a “starting point” – which has determining effects on both production and consumption.⁹ Thus, rather than focusing on digitalization or cyberspace in the abstract, we might better examine the particular types of cyberspaces that are instituted in specific localities under particular cultural, economic, and political circumstances. In saying

this, evidently, I follow the lead originally given by Raymond Williams in his study of how the development of television technology was influenced by the contexts in which it operated.¹⁰ In arguing thus, I also follow the example set by Danny Miller and Don Slater's study of the Internet in Trinidad – as a way of understanding how the worlds of the virtual and the actual are differently integrated in a specific context.¹¹

None of this is to argue that the specific capacities and affordances of a given technology or infrastructure are either unimportant or inconsequential. Much of what follows – whether in the discussion of transport infrastructures in Part One or of the various technologies of containment in Part Two or in relation to the mobile phone and the container box in Part Three – is precisely concerned to develop a more nuanced analysis of their respective and particular powers. The question, for me, is how to understand the operation (and limits) of these powers as they are instantiated in particular circumstances. Following de Certeau, I take the view that the most illuminating moment is often that at which the strategies of powerful agents, institutions, and their technologies are in tension with the tactics of those whom they hope to control, who have to “make do” by choosing from the particular menu of technologies on offer to them and mobilizing these resources to their own purposes as best they can.¹² The outcome in each case has to be considered in the particular as the balance of power varies between different instances – and thus the result of the encounter is by no means always predictable.

Techno-Globalization: Nations and Regions

Coming from a cultural studies tradition which prioritizes grounded theory and emphasizes specificity, I am unsympathetic to abstracted “One-Size-Fits-All” analyses of globalization-through-technology, which reduce the whole of history to one Big Story of deterritorialization and cultural homogenization. Here, we may perhaps be better served by some differentiations between the perspectives of a variety of different regions, nations, and periods. Nonetheless, the discourses of techno-globalism continue to repeat the claim that nations are (somehow) about to disappear as a result of the advance of new technologies. However, Kai Hafez rightly warns of the dangers of exaggerating the degree to which media globalization has, in fact, taken place and questions the idea that there is any simple, linear process of transnationalization in the media.¹³ He also insists that we attend to the continuing significance of national or regional boundaries in the effective constitution of media markets – both old and new. Thus, not only television (especially in its news-based modalities) but also a great deal of Internet traffic still flows within, rather than across, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Such boundaries, and their political manifestations, continue to be of great significance, globalization notwithstanding.

Similarly, if you consult the Facebook app on “Facebook Stories” you can readily see how the structure and patterning of Internet “friending” runs along the very predictably restricted paths laid down by national, cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries.¹⁴

Anthropologizing Media Studies: Against EurAm-centrism

These issues also have to be considered alongside the problem of media and communications studies’ continuing EurAm-centrism.¹⁵ Here, the difficulties are several. As authors such as John Downing and Brian Larkin have argued, most of these theories have drawn their template from the particular technocultural conditions of the white, middle-class, Euro-American world – what has also been called the “WEIRD” word – not just statistically abnormal but more specifically White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and (more or less) Democratic. The problem is that they have often been imported wholesale and applied elsewhere without being appropriately tailored to the local situation.¹⁶ From a perspective beyond the North Atlantic this means that media studies increasingly appears parochial because of its failure to recognize the specificity of its own history.¹⁷

We thus need to develop a more internationally comparative perspective, but if the benchmark from which we start is always that of a Western perspective (to which all other instances are merely treated as supplementary, or even exotic) then the problem of ethnocentrism remains unresolved. The simple addition of “deviations” from a Western norm cannot satisfactorily remedy this fundamental epistemological problem. In this context, some anthropological perspectives may be of assistance. The new millennium has seen a welcome increase in work which brings specifically anthropological perspectives on culture into discussions of media, and what unites this work is its insistent relativization of all cultural certainties.¹⁸

Decentering Mediated Modernities

The necessary scale of the relativization at stake here is daunting – not least because discussions of media and communications inevitably presume as their backdrop a variety of strong (and again usually EurAmcentric) presumptions about the nature of modernity – and of its central institutions, such as the city. In the world’s rich Northwest, we tend to think of cities in terms of their size and wealth, and of them necessarily having particular facilities and infrastructures (such as municipal transport and sewage systems). However, empirically speaking, most of the world’s fastest growing cities, all of which are relatively

poor, have none of these conventional attributes. Growth in cities like Mumbai and Lagos is occurring without widespread industrialization, infrastructure provision, or formal job creation. These are places that “invert every essential characteristic of the so-called modern city.” They are not “catching up” with the West: rather, they challenge us to rethink what a “modern” city is, or may become.¹⁹

In this same spirit, Brian Larkin’s study of emergent media cultures in northern Nigeria (which forms a significant background to my later discussion of these issues in Chapter 8 in relation to the mobile phone) begins by asking what media theory would look like if it began from how the media actually work in a place like the contemporary Nigerian city of Kano. Thus he very deliberately places Nigerian media in the context of the particular types of institutions, infrastructures, technologies, cosmologies, and conceptions of selfhood available there.²⁰ Larkin’s aim is thus to defamiliarize Western presumptions and productively “interrupt” our taken-for-granted approaches, insofar as they assume the universal normality of the sociopolitical configurations of the West, by providing us with a kind of negative mirror in which we might see our own taken-for-granted practices in a “denaturalized” light.²¹

In developing my arguments in the succeeding chapters, I follow Doreen Massey by insisting that, in the worlds of the media as elsewhere, we must attend to geographical, regional, and spatial variability. However, this is not to reduce geography to a concern with the merely local, the empirical, and the a-theoretical but, rather, to recognize, with her, that there is nothing “mere” about the local. “Spatializing” media theory means recognizing its multiplicity and its openness. As Massey observes, the recognition of spatial multiplicities is a precondition for the recognition of temporal openness, so as to literally “make space” for other stories of the future.²²

Cultural Presentism: Problems of History

However, as Lynn Spigel has put it, the more we speak of futurology, the more we need also to place contemporary changes in a historical perspective.²³ The problem here is that much of media and communication studies, as presently constituted, suffers from a drastically foreshortened historical perspective and thus displays a form of what Graham Murdock and Michael Pickering call “cultural presentism.”²⁴ In an era of new modes of digitalization, technical convergence, and individualized and interactive media systems, it becomes all the more urgent that we place all these issues in a more effective historical frame. Happily, there are some signs of this deficiency now being made good. Siegfried Zielinski’s path-breaking work on what he calls the “deep time” of media history has already helpfully recontextualized the particular developments of cinema and television as what he calls mere “entr’actes” in a much longer

history of audiovisual media.²⁵ Ultimately, as demonstrated in Barbara Stafford and Frances Turpak's book on the Getty Museum's (2001) "Devices of Wonder" exhibition, all this involves a very long history. There are continuities here which can usefully be traced back to the worlds of the "magic mirror" and the portable *Wunderkabinett* (the precursor to today's laptop or tablet?), as well as to the worlds of the automaton, the magic lantern, and the camera obscura.²⁶ In the recent period, the development of what has come to be called "media archaeology" has now begun to turn this historicizing perspective on a variety of aspects of media research that previously lacked the benefit of the relativization it helpfully brings to any infatuation with the charms of the present.²⁷

Histories of Speed-Up: Old Futures?

We are often told that we are entering a new historical epoch, in which change takes place at an ever increasing rate as result of the effects of increasingly powerful technologies.²⁸ However, it can perfectly well be argued that we live in an age of technological stasis, relatively speaking, compared with the speed of technological change in the late nineteenth century (the era of the invention of radio, the cinema, photography, the steamship, the railroad, and the airplane). In relation to the changing mobility patterns discussed in Part Two of the book, Steven Kern's analysis of the culture of time and space in the late nineteenth century shows that, in proportional terms, the increase in numbers of people travelling and the distances they travelled then was far more radical a change than anything experienced in recent years. We shall return to those issues in more detail in Chapter 3.²⁹

Speaking of the (relatively) unchanging nature of quotidian routines in much of the rich West, the journalist Simon Jenkins observes that he still shaves with soap and razor, dons clothes of cloth and wool, reads a newspaper, drinks coffee heated by gas or electricity, and goes to work with the aid of a petrol and internal combustion engine to a centrally heated office, where he types on a QWERTY keyboard.³⁰ As he notes, none of these activities has altered significantly during the past century, whereas in the previous hundred years, the pattern of daily life altered beyond recognition. Similarly, in relation to the contemporary notion of our living in a digital age, Tom Standage rightly insists that its commencement must be dated at least from the moment in the mid-nineteenth century, when the telegraph – as the first technology to reduce all information to a binary code – was invented.³¹

These issues also bring us to the eternally vexed question of how to address the question of periodization in our work. Just as Raymond Williams noted the coexistence of residual, dominant, and emergent tendencies within any one historical period, Fernand Braudel always insisted on the need to recognize the simultaneous existence of different temporalities and Bruno Latour argues that

“modern time,” in any pure form, has never existed and we inevitably live amidst a jumble of technological eras.³²

To turn to the currently available visions of the techno-future, Richard Barbrook observes that the imaginary of technological futurism is curiously static, and that the vision of high-tech utopia offered to us in the early twenty-first century is curiously similar to that which could have been seen at the 1964 New York World’s Fair.³³ At stake in these contemporary discourses of what Vincent Mosco calls “cyberbole” is the tendency to see that future as the pure extension of logic, technical rationality, and linear progress. As we shall see further, in Chapter 5, technologies of different eras have, in their turn, often evoked the same vision of “redemption.”³⁴

The further problem here is that scholars have tended to focus exclusively on technological novelty, while in reality, it is older technologies that continue to dominate our lives. Moreover, our accounts of technology are fundamentally unbalanced by a propensity for focusing on invention over use, acquisition over maintenance, and inevitability over choice³⁵ yet what matters more is how technologies are used and by whom – and how they are transformed and “reinvented” in hybrid or creole forms as their use shifts from one context to another.

Thinking about the history of technology-in-use – and concentrating on the adaptation, operation, and maintenance of things – offers us a very different perspective from that of the innovation-centered model. Most importantly, it offers us a global history, by means of which, as Edgerton argues, we can shift our attention away from the large-scale, spectacular, masculine, prestigious technologies of the rich white world, to also bring into focus the small-scale, mundane, feminized, and often creolized technologies of the *bidonvilles* and shanty towns of the world.³⁶ These will often involve adaptations of older, imported technologies that are given a new lease of life and adapted for local use (such as the tin drum, flattened into a roof or wall in a Brazilian *favela* or the scooter crossed with the rickshaw to produce the *tuk-tuk* taxis of Thailand). These technologies are at the heart of the fastest growing cities, such as Lagos and Mumbai – the places where, as I noted earlier, the modernities of the future are already taking shape.

Media Centrism and the Materiality of Communications

Having outlined my theoretical concerns in relation to the general issues which frame the contents of the chapters that follow, I now turn to the question of media centrism. I have detailed elsewhere my reservations about the impossibly media-centric nature of communication studies.³⁷ Much of the rest of this book consists of an attempt to outline what a non media-centric approach

would look like – mobilizing an expanded notion of communications, including its material dimensions. In relation to the latter issue, my argument can perhaps usefully be read in the context of what has been called the recent “materialist turn” in communications studies. For my own part, it was coming across the late Alan Sekula’s militant denunciation of the largely unquestioned (even if erroneous) belief that, as he put it, e-mail and air travel were the main bases of globalization that set me on this track. It was his work on the central role of container shipping as the fundamental “enabling condition” of trade in the global economy that provided the original inspiration for the analysis developed in Chapter 9. This emphasis on materiality and infrastructure can also be seen in the more recent “materialist turn” in the field, reflected in the work of scholars such as Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, among others.³⁸

A Reader’s Guide

In terms of structure, this book is divided into three parts: the first sets out the theoretical and conceptual agenda of the approach that I am advocating and focuses on the role of communications and transport technologies in the constitution of communities at different scales. The second reframes the concerns of media studies within the broader context of the new forms of mobility – and of (virtual) geography – which are held to characterize the contemporary world. The third offers a set of case studies demonstrating how the perspectives outlined above may help us to develop a better understanding of three figures that I have chosen as emblematic of our era – the migrant, the mobile phone, and the container box.

However, I must also enter a caution here about the claims I make for my argument. Given the gargantuan scale and range of the topics the book covers, I have had to restrict, for the sake of brevity, any ambitions to be exhaustive in my approach to the particular specialist subfields which I survey. My examples and case studies can thus be no more than indicative, rather than conclusive. Moreover, as I weave the arguments together around a set of recurring themes focused on the different forms of articulation of virtual and material geographies, I inevitably run the risk of some repetition in my attempts to demonstrate the virtues of a multidimensional perspective on any one issue. Whether the game is worth the candle is, ultimately, for the reader to judge.³⁹

Part One: The Return of Geopolitics

Chapter 1, “Communications, Transport, and Territory,” begins by outlining the problems that have arisen as a result of the gradual shrinking of the meaning of “communications” to include only its rhetorical and discursive dimensions.

It goes on to make the case for restoring the broken link between the analysis of symbolic and physical modes of communication, including the material forms of transport and mobility. In all of this, my further intention is to go beyond the social sciences' conventionally "a-mobile" perspective (usually limited to the territory of a given nation-state) while offering an approach to transport and mobility that, so as to better address their sociocultural and political dimensions, transcends questions of mere economic functionality.

Chapter 2, "Constituting Europe: Empires, Nations, and Techno-zones," addresses the role of communications and transport technologies in the constitution of communities. Here, we attend specifically to their role in enabling power to be operationalized across increasingly greater distances in the process of the formation of both nations and empires in Europe. Central here are the arguments initially developed by the "physiocrats" of eighteenth-century France about the crucial role of transport systems in enabling "free circulation" and thus ensuring the economic health of the nation – arguments with a strong contemporary resonance. Beyond these historical examples, I end the chapter by focusing on the contemporary construction of the European Union as a transnational community, or in Andrew Barry's terms a "techno-zone"⁴⁰ based on specific practices of community building and border control, in relation to questions of trade, technology, and demography.

Part Two: Reconceptualizing Communications: Mobilities and Geographies

Chapter 3, "Sedentarism, Nomadology, and 'New Mobilities,'" is principally concerned with exploring the potential of the "new mobilities" paradigm for reconceptualizing the study of communications in terms of the historical evolution of mobility systems.⁴¹ These issues are contextualized by reference to debates about conceptions of community, place, and mobility, and I propose an approach that aims to transcend the sterile opposition often posed between nomadological and sedentarist perspectives on these topics. It goes on to critique conventional histories of the field, which often produce a simplistic narrative, principally focused on the continual increase in technologically enabled speed.⁴² The chapter explores a variety of historical periodizations of mobility – and the extent to which the technologies of each era produce a given mode of subjectivity. It also reconsiders claims about the "newness" of contemporary mobilities in the context of evidence about earlier periods of time–space compression and globalization, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As its title, "Disaggregating Mobilities: Zoning, Exclusion, and Containment," indicates, Chapter 4 is concerned to move beyond the abstract metaphysics of mobility to disaggregate its different forms. This involves distinguishing

between the mobility enjoyed by different categories of persons as well as the disjunctions between the increasing fluidity in the global flow of goods on the one hand and the increasing modes of control exercised over (certain types of) population movements on the other. Thus we focus here on the changing forms of material and virtual borders; on mobility hierarchies and relative speeds of mobility; on the politics of waiting; and on the various modes of surveillance, exclusion, and containment applied to the mobility of differently categorized persons and entities.

Chapter 5, “Geography, Topography and Topology: Networks and Infrastructures,” focuses on the new forms of “philosophical geography”⁴³ that have emerged with the development of networked forms of techno-connectivity. The issue of geographical proximity is often now argued to have been displaced by that of topological connexity, so that absolute space or distance becomes less important than the linkages made through various forms of networked virtuality. The chapter recontextualizes arguments concerning networking as a form of “deterritorialization” by placing them in a historical perspective, by recognizing that the ideology of “salvation through networks” is no new phenomenon. It reviews the emergence of “liquid geographies” and also addresses the continuing significance of material infrastructures.⁴⁴ It further examines the specific geography of the Internet, itself manifest in phenomena such as “digital districts” – in which the “new technology” companies of our day are, in fact, found to cluster in very particular geographical locations. It also examines the extent to which, rather than demonstrating a flat or rhizomic structure, these virtual worlds increasingly display similar forms of hierarchy to those familiar from previous cultural industries, with a small number of large companies controlling a high proportion of virtual activity.

Chapter 6, “The Virtual and the Actual: Being There, Disembodiment, and Deterritorialization,” offers an analysis of contemporary debates about the changing relationship of virtual and actual geographies. It addresses the history of communications technologies with the capacity to transform material absence (or distance) into virtual presence and focuses on debates about the capacity of contemporary digital technologies to provide us with an experience of “place polygamy.” These technologies are often argued to “disembed” us thereby from the material world of physical geography. However, I offer here a perspective that, while recognizing the significance of the new electronic landscapes in which we live,⁴⁵ is skeptical of arguments about the “place-annihilating” capacities of communications technologies.⁴⁶ Here we explore the increasing interdependence of virtual and actual geographies, as exemplified by the development of the “locative media” of today’s geospatial web. The chapter also addresses the capacities (and limitations) of differently mediated modes of communication in relation to the continuing “compulsions” of physical proximity and the uncertainties of virtual forms of trust.⁴⁷

Part Three: The Mobility of People, Information, and Commodities: Case Studies in Communications Geography

Chapter 7, “Migration: Changing Paradigms, Embodied Mobilities, and Material Practices,” addresses the archaeology of the changing modes (and typologies) of historical and contemporary migrancy as a differentiated set of material practices developed in varying contexts and constituting a variety of complex new “ethnoscapes,” in Arjun Appadurai’s terminology.⁴⁸ Here we explore questions related to the development of multisited households and diasporic networks and also the experience of ongoing “place-polygamy” and trans-local subjectivities on the part of a growing number of migrants. The chapter revisits some of the concerns of my earlier work on the ontological crisis that migrancy often presents for “host” countries,⁴⁹ all of which has been given a new significance in the context of recent crises around refugee and asylum seekers in Europe and the Middle East. It further discusses how, in the specific case of the United Kingdom, the division between those who consider themselves part of that community and those deemed to be illegitimate “outsiders” is now being redrawn on grounds other than the familiar ones of race and ethnicity. The chapter also offers a perspective on “geopolitics from below” addressing these issues from the point of view of would-be migrants themselves. Thus it also focuses on the forms of ingenuity and resourcefulness developed in the informal economy that supports the practice of long-distance migrancy. In this context, we shall consider the various routes (and blockages) in the “lines of flight” along which flows of capital, data, commodities, and migrants all travel, though at very different speeds. Taking the specific case of African migrancy, we consider the situation of those attempting to cross the “Desperate Straits,” which separate North Africa from Europe. Following Ursula Biemann’s attempt to reverse the usual “victim perspectives,” in which migrants are only shown at the moment of their capture (or failure), we also investigate the complex routes by which sub-Saharan migrants are guided across the deserts to the North African coast by Tuareg nomads mobilizing an ingenious combination of traditional desert navigational skills and the latest in GPS and four-wheel-drive technology.⁵⁰

Chapter 8, “Mobile Communications and Ubiquitous Connectivity: Technologies of Transformation?,” focuses on the debates about the transformative powers of mobile telephony.⁵¹ Here, I treat the mobile phone as a heuristic device around which important debates about the culture and politics of our era are now condensed. In this respect, the “mobile” has perhaps become one of the “emblematic” technologies of our age – just as the motor car and the television set were emblematic of previous eras. Here I address the affordances offered by the mobile phone, paying particular attention to its potential roles

(along with other mobile ICTs) as a democratic device capable of empowering and giving voice to the dispossessed in moments of political struggle. Conversely, I also address its potential role, in other contexts, as a “secessionary” or “capsular” technology with a tendency to reinforce the narrowing of social bonds.⁵² I argue that we need to understand the mobile phone not in terms of any technological “essence” but in terms of its place within the overall repertoire of “inconspicuous but omnipresent” technologies of mediation that now surround us.⁵³ Building on the earlier critique of Eurocentrism, the chapter then examines, from a “contextualist” point of view, how the mobile phone has developed in parts of the world where the social, demographic, technological, political, and infrastructural assumptions of the rich Northwest simply do not apply. Here we shall address some of the “adaptations” of the mobile phone among the poor of the Third World and its significance when inserted into nomadic or religious, rather than sedentary or secular societies.

By way of better articulating the concerns of chapters 7 and 8, in the conclusion to this chapter, I turn to the question of the specific functions of mobile telephony in the world of migrants – with whose lives, as “mobility pioneers,” the mobile phone has been claimed to share a significant “elective affinity.” Here we attend to the growing significance of multisite households and translocal subjectivities in the migrant experience, as well as to the particular significance of mobile forms of communication as the “social glue” that holds together migrants and their families.⁵⁴

Chapter 9, “Containerization as Globalization: The Mobility of Commodities,” takes as its starting point Alan Sekula’s critique of “idealist” perspectives on globalization that ignore the material foundation of the global economy – the transport of material goods across the world’s oceans.⁵⁵ The chapter focuses on how much the mobility of objects in commodity form has been transformed by the technology of containerization.⁵⁶ In examining the contentious history of “standardization” in the development of the (transmodal) container box, we also discover an illuminating “pre-echo” of contemporary debates about (cross-platform) digital convergence technology in the media field and communications. By attending to the material practices underpinning these transport systems (and the unresolved tensions and contradictions within them), we may better avoid any abstracted or dematerialized perspectives on globalization. The container box itself is increasingly recognized as one of the central symbols of our era, and its story is dramatized here by means of an account of the BBC’s “Box” project. In that case, the journey of one particular container box around the world was used to provide a multiplatform narrative about the multimodal transport system on which we now all depend so much. The chapter goes on to develop a critical perspective on the significance of the fast-growing logistics industry, which has come to be so important in the recent period, as a way of managing the complex long-distance supply chains that now link the different parts of the global economy. In this context we also consider the significance of

the recent rise of various forms of (hi-tech) sea-borne piracy and the effects on global shipping of the “securitization” strategies that have been deployed as desperate, and thus far, only partially successful, attempts to combat them.

In conclusion, the chapter also queries the conventional story of the container box as a necessarily transformative technology by examining the extent to which the standardization process has itself always been contradictory and contested – and thus never universally instantiated. We also have to recognize the wide range of uses for which the container box has been repurposed in different parts of the globe, as it now functions not only as a container for travelling commodities but also, in different contexts, as a form of temporary shelter, of low-cost-housing, and as one of the “building blocks” of military encampments, prisons, educational institutions, and large-scale markets across the globe. Thus, we end the story of the “box” by exploring the multiple purposes to which it is now put in different places.

Back to the Front ...

By way of bringing these introductory remarks to a (temporary) conclusion, let me refer back to the image on the cover, which brings together many of the key themes of the book. In the photograph, we see a group of illegal migrants who were being smuggled by ship and had been temporarily left to themselves on a beach – at which point, they all seized the opportunity to point their mobile phones towards the sky (as if in some ritualistic form of supplication) in the hope getting a phone signal, perhaps so that they could communicate with their families back home, or maybe with those awaiting them at the end of the next stage of their journey. The ship from which they had disembarked is hidden, off-screen, as this poignant little scene is enacted.

However, beyond the micropolitics of the personal dramas at stake here, there are also geopolitical issues in play: the beach itself is in Djibouti, at the narrow Bab el Mandeb Straits, on the Gulf of Aden. This is one of the key geopolitical “pinchpoints” in global trade through which sail a vast proportion of the world’s container ships. Indeed 30 percent of all shipping, worldwide, passes through here, *en route* to and from the Suez Canal. In recent years Djibouti’s strategic importance has been boosted further, as it has now become an important base for international “anti-piracy” strategies, involving not only France (as Djibouti’s ex-colonial master) but also Germany and Japan, alongside America, for whom it is central to their antiterrorism strategy. At the time of writing (May 2016), as part of their new “active defence” strategy, the Chinese government has decided effectively to contest the long-standing American dominance of the Gulf by building its own militarized port directly across from what is already America’s largest military outpost in Africa, thus transforming the straits into a major potential fault line in any future conflict over world trade.⁵⁷

Notes

- 1 D. Morley (2009) For a Materialist, Non Media-Centric Media Studies, *Television and New Media* 10 (1); and D. Morley (2012) Television, Technology and Culture: A Contextualist Approach, *Communication Review* 15.
- 2 A. Mattelart (1996) *The Invention of Communication*, University of Minnesota Press; Y. de la Haye (1979) *Marx and Engels On the Means of Communication*, International General; H. Innis (1950) *Empire and Communications*, Oxford University Press; J. Carey (1989) *Communication as Culture*, Unwin Hyman; J.D. Peters (1999) *Speaking into the Air*, University of Chicago Press.
- 3 This paradigm has been developed in the work of the *Mobilities* Journal launched in 2006.
- 4 A. Appadurai (1996) *Modernity at Large*, University of Minnesota Press.
- 5 T. Cresswell (2006) *On the Move*, Routledge.
- 6 R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.) (2008) *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell.
- 7 F. Kittler (1999) *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford University Press; Scott Lash (1994) *Economies of Signs and Spaces*, Sage; and L. Manovich (2002) *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press.
- 8 J. Bryce (1987) Family Time and Television Use, in T. Lindlof (ed.), *Natural Audiences*, Ablex Books.
- 9 This emphasis is similar to that of the “circuit of culture” model developed by Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Open University – see P. du Gay, S. Hall, L. James, *et al.* (1996) *Doing Cultural Studies* Open University Press.
- 10 See R. Williams (1974) *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*, Fontana Books. See also the work of the subsequent scholars associated with the “social shaping of technology” approach, D. Mckenzie and J. Wajcman (eds.) (1999) *The Social Shaping of Technology*, Open University Press. For a critique of that approach, see among others M. Lister, J. Dovey, S. Giddings, *et al.* (2008) *The New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge.
- 11 D. Miller and D. Slater (2000) *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, Berg, London.
- 12 M. de Certeau (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press.
- 13 K. Hafez (2007) *The Myth of Media Globalisation*, Polity Press.
- 14 Facebook app at www.facebookstories.com/stories.
- 15 The term “EurAm” appeared in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s and reflects the lack of distinction between the cultures from the Japanese perspective. See D. Morley and K. Robins (1995) *Spaces of Identity*, Routledge, Ch. 8.
- 16 J. Downing (2005) *Internationalising Media Theory*, Sage; B. Larkin (2008) *Signal and Noise Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, Duke University Press; J. Diamond (2013) *The World Until Yesterday*, Penguin. On these issues cf. also J. Curran and M.-J. Park (eds.) (2000) *De-Westernising Media Studies*, Routledge.

17 In this context Georgette Wang argues that, to take a key example, Habermas' conception of the public sphere, having been coined to describe a particular discursive space within eighteenth-century Europe, cannot simply be transposed to other locations, with different political and cultural histories, without considerable modification G. Wang (2011) *After the Fall of the Tower of Babel*, in *De-Westernising Communication Research*, Routledge.

18 Cf. the collections by K. Askew and R. Wilk (eds.) (2002) *The Anthropology of Media*, Blackwell; F. Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod, and B. Larkin (eds.) (2002) *Media Worlds*, University of California Press; J.X. Inda and R. Rosaldo (eds.) (2002) *The Anthropology of Globalisation*, Blackwell; E. Rothenbuhler and M. Coman (eds.) (2005) *Media Anthropology*, Sage.

19 R. Koolhaas *et al.* (eds.) (2004) *Mutations*, Actar Publications.

20 Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; cf. also P. Mankekar (2015) *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality*, Duke University Press.

21 Cf. A. Abbas and J. Erni (eds.) (2005) Introduction, in *Internationalising Cultural Studies*, Blackwell.

22 D. Massey (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press; D. Massey (2005) *For Space*, Sage.

23 L. Spigel (2004) Introduction, in L. Spigel and J. Olsson (eds.), *Television After TV*, Duke University Press.

24 G. Murdock and M. Pickering (2009) The Birth of Distance, in M. Bailey (ed.), *Narrating Media History*, Routledge.

25 S. Zielinski (1999) *Audiovisions: Cinema and Television as Entr'actes in History*, University of Amsterdam Press; S. Zielinski (2008) *The Deep Time of the Media: Towards an Archeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, MIT Press.

26 B. Stafford and F. Terpak (2001) *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* Getty Institute.

27 J. Parikka (ed.) (2011) *MediaNatures*, Open Humanities Press; J. Parikka (2012) *What is Media Archeology?* Polity Press.

28 Cf. D. Edgerton (2006) *The Shock of the Old*, Profile Books.

29 S. Kern (2003) *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918*, Harvard University Press. The Economist Ha-Joon Chang makes the point quite literally: as he observes, the invention of the telegraph reduced the time that it took to carry a message across the Atlantic from two weeks to 2 minutes, a quite spectacular reduction, by a quite spectacular reduction, by a factor of approximately 1000. Conversely, insofar as the Internet has reduced the time of sending a page of text from the 10 seconds needed by a fax machine down to one second (or a fraction thereof) that is a far less significant reduction of a factor of only around 10%. H.-J. Chen (2010) The Net Isn't as Important as We Think, *The Observer New Review* (August 29).

30 S. Jenkins (2007) The Age of Technological Revolution is 100 Years Dead, *The Guardian* (January 24).

31 T. Standage (1998) *The Victorian Internet*, Walker and Co. Amazon and eBay may have speeded up earlier forms of long-distance retailing – such as the kind of catalog-based, mail-order systems of postal shopping familiar in the industrialized West in the 1960s – but they certainly did not invent it. As far back as the mid-nineteenth century, the Sears Roebuck catalog made a cornucopia of consumer goods available to farmers in isolated rural homesteads across North America who had never previously been able to acquire them at all. In historical terms, so far as the development of consumer cultures goes, the implementation of that system, 150 years ago, was a far more revolutionary innovation than that achieved in recent years by Amazon.

32 R. Williams (1965) *The Long Revolution*, Penguin; Williams, *Television Technology and Cultural Form*; F. Braudel (1995) *A History of Civilisations*, Penguin; B. Latour (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

33 R. Barbrook (2007) *Imaginary Futures*, Pluto Press.

34 V. Mosco (2004) *The Digital Sublime*, MIT Press. A. Mattelart (2000) *Networking the World*, University of Minnesota Press.

35 Cf. B. Winston (2005) *Media, Technology and Society*, Routledge.

36 Edgerton, *Shock of the Old*, pp. xi–xiii; cf. also P. Oliver (2003) *Dwellings: The Vernacular House Worldwide*, Phaidon Books; P. Chamoiseaux (1997) *Texaco*, Granta Books.

37 Morley, For a Materialist.

38 See A. Sekula (1996) *Fish Story*, Richter Verlag; see also his “essay-films”: A. Sekula (2006) *The Lottery of the Sea*, Icarus Films; N. Burch and A. Sekula (2010) *The Forgotten Space*, Doc.Eye Film with WildArt Film. On the “materialist turn” see L. Parks (2005) *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual*, Duke University Press; L. Parks and N. Starosielski (eds.) (2014) *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, University of Illinois Press; N. Starosielski (2015) *The Undersea Network*: Duke University Press.

39 In this context I have to acknowledge, in passing, my somewhat inadvertent role models – Gustave Flaubert’s mythical scribes Bouvard and Pécuchet, who, rather in the spirit of Diderot’s great enterprise of the “Encyclopédie,” set out to master the full range of disciplines necessary to understand the world. Of course, they end up in a comedy of disillusionment with the inevitable limitations of all forms of knowledge, overwhelmed by unsolvable intellectual complexities and reduced to the role of pessimistic scribes with the impossible task of copying out everything that is already known. There were certainly times, when writing this book, when I had a strong sense that I knew just how they felt. (G. Flaubert (1954) *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, New Directions, with an introduction by Lionel Trilling.)

40 A. Barry (2001) *Political Machines*, Athlone Press.

41 J. Urry (2007) *Mobilities*, Polity Press.

42 J. Tomlinson (2007) *The Culture of Speed*, Sage.

43 M. Serres and B. Latour (1995) *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, University of Michigan Press.

44 Cf. the work of Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, and Parks and Starosielski, *Signal Traffic*.

45 Morley and Robins, *Spaces of Identity*.

46 J. Meyrowitz (1985) *No Sense of Place*, Oxford University Press.

47 D. Boden and H. Molotch (1994) The Compulsions of Proximity, in R. Friedland and D. Boden (eds.), *NowHere: Space, Time and Modernity*, University of California Press.

48 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

49 D. Morley (2000) *Home Territories*, Routledge.

50 U. Biemann (2010) *Mission Reports*, Bildmuseet/Arnolfini Gallery.

51 Cf. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* re “technoscapes.”

52 S. Graham and S. Marvin (1998) *Net Effects*, Comedia/Demos; L. de Cauter (2005) *The Capsular Civilisation*, Reflect Books.

53 H. Bausinger (1990) *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*, Indiana University Press.

54 S. Vertovec (2004) Cheap Calls: The Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism, *Global Networks* 4; M. Madianiou and D. Miller (2013) *Migration and New Media*, Routledge.

55 Sekula, *Fish Story*; Sekula *Lottery of the Sea*; Burch and Sekula *The Forgotten Space*.

56 M. Levinson (2006) *The Box*, Princeton University Press.

57 K. Manson (2016) Report from Djibouti, *Financial Times Weekend Magazine* (April 2–3), pp. 12–19.

Part I

The Return of Geopolitics

1

Communications, Transport, and Territory

Introduction

An old dictionary I have at home defines communications as “an act of imparting (esp. news); information given; intercourse; common door or passage or road or rail or telegraph between places.”¹ This older definition encompasses not only the symbolic realm – which is what we nowadays tend to think of first when the question of communication arises – but also the field of transport studies. It was in this spirit that Marx and Engels defined communication broadly enough to include the movement of commodities, people, information, and capital – including within their remit not only the instruments for transmitting information but also the material transportation infrastructures of their day. As Marx argued, the “creation of the physical conditions of exchange,” and in particular, of the railways, was a necessity for the development of nineteenth century capital, insofar as it allowed products to be converted into “uprooted” commodities as they were transported beyond their region of production into more distant areas. To that extent “the railroad was to travel as industry was to manufacture.” In the *Grundrisse*, Marx argues that it is precisely transportation between geographical points which turns objects into commodities, arguing that “this locational movement – the bringing of the product to the market, which is the necessary precondition of its circulation ... could more precisely be regarded as the transformation of the product into a commodity.”²

Marx and Engels’ concern was with the connections between the technologies for transmitting messages and transporting commodities and people, all of which was seen as part of a broader, geopolitical “science of territory” – a set of concerns which are readily re-codable into contemporary debates about deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Evidently, nowadays, the territories and technologies concerned are virtual as much as material, but I shall argue that, far from living in a supposedly “post-geographical” age, geographies, of one sort or the other, continue to matter, if now in different ways. In this context,

I will argue that what is needed is a re-excavation of the tradition of work that continues Marx and Engels' concerns with the constitutive powers of systems of communications and transport.³

The Power of Metaphor

In 1933 the art historian Rolf Arnheim proposed that the new invention of television was best understood metaphorically, in relation to questions of physical transport – as a “means of distribution” – but of images and sounds rather than of objects or persons. To this extent, he argued, television is fundamentally related to modes of transport such as the motor car and the airplane – but in this case, as a “means of transport for the mind.”⁴ Evidently, Arnheim’s argument works at the level of metaphor by transposing the function of physical modes of transport to the virtual sphere, where the entities being transported – images and ideas – are themselves immaterial. If we trace the etymology of the word “metaphor,” we find that its original Greek meaning is precisely to “transport” or “carry across” – in this case, to transfer significance, by using a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transposed from one realm of meaning to another. As Jonathan Sterne observes, some of our central terms for discussing these matters already invoke the concept of “communication as a subspecies of movement.” Thus, Bruno Latour notes that “the word *metaphoros* is written on all [furniture- DM] moving vans in Greece” for the simple reason that the English term “metaphor” derives from the Greek words for “to transfer or carry.”⁵ To take another example, if many cab drivers in the metropolitan cities of the West are immigrants who have come from elsewhere and then take a job moving the city’s residents around, then these “metaphorical” processes are doubly condensed in the figure of the immigrant taxi driver.⁶ Arnheim’s proposition is further extended by Ben Bachmair, who is concerned with the particular relationship between motor car and the television as “mobile” media – which have, in combination, transformed the pace, pattern, and scale of social life in the twentieth century.⁷ He argues that television fitted snugly into – and extended – the mobile lifestyles encouraged by the motorcar. Furthermore, he insists that the symbiotic relationship between the television and the motorcar should be seen as parallel to that between the telegraph and the railway system in the earlier era.⁸

Passengers, Readers, Drivers, and Spectators

In English, the word “transport” can refer either to this material form of motion, in which a person or thing is moved from A to B, or to the immaterial process in which, for instance, the reader of a novel is mentally “transported” to another

(in this case, fictional) realm. These two different dimensions were notably brought together at the moment in the nineteenth century when the coming of the railways in Britain, and thus the particular mode of “passive/comfortable” travel they allowed, created a market for train reading – and thus for the emergence of platform-based newsagents in railway stations. Henceforth, the railway traveller/reader could be simultaneously “transported” in both these dimensions.⁹ In his work on the coming of the railway in the earlier period, Wolfgang Schivelbusch shows how the new experience of moving through the landscape at high speed created a different form of “proto-cinematic” vision for the seated passenger, who is personally immobile and yet transported elsewhere. To this extent, the train (and later the car), as well as the various screens of the media, can be seen to have contributed to the development of a specifically modern subjectivity of accelerated visual stimulation.¹⁰

Within the field of media and cinema studies, some authors, such as Margaret Morse and Anne Friedberg, have, in recent years, begun to address the relationship between the visual experience of physical mobility, when landscapes are viewed through the window of a car, ship, train, or plane and forms of media spectatorship of moving images. Thus Morse considers the analogous nature of the experiences of vision through the car windscreen on a motorway, through the display windows in a shopping mall and that provided by the television screen. Friedberg is similarly concerned with the parallels between the visual experiences of the car driver and the cinema/television spectators. As she notes, drawing on the work of both Baudrillard and Virilio, if the “cinema provides a virtual mobility for its spectators, producing the illusion of transport to other times and places,” the driver is themselves physically immobile, cocooned in the comfort of the “audiovisual vehicle” in which they traverse material space, while “the surrounding landscape [unfolds] like a televised screen.” Thus she explores what she calls the “framed visuality” of the car windscreen, cinema, television, and computer screens as modes of spectatorship all shaped by their relation to the architectural form of the screen/window.¹¹

To this extent, I would argue that the exploration of these metaphors, linking previously ignored dimensions of the relationships between communications and transport, can potentially be very productive.¹² However, if, as George Lakoff argued many years ago, metaphors are what we “live by” insofar as they structure our thought at a very fundamental level,¹³ we do always need to be careful in their deployment as they sometimes hide as much as they reveal. We should be very careful, as I will argue later following Sara Ahmed, to avoid the dangers of reducing the material processes of migrancy to a superficially convenient metaphor for “mobility” in the abstract, as if it were the “essence” of the contemporary world. We are not all mobile in the same way, and my ambition here is to spell out the significant differences between our various engagements in the different forms of virtual and actual mobility and stasis.¹⁴

In relation to questions of material and metaphorical distance, our concerns must be, as Birgitta Frezzo argues, with the specifically social dimensions according to which mobility is given meaning – which always occur within specific relations of power. The question is not simply that of empirically “mapping” material issues such as distance, speed, and means of transport. It is also a matter of the socially constructed discourses through which places – and the differences and distances between them – are defined as “here” or “there.” The question then is “where or what ... or how far away is ‘there.’”¹⁵ The further questions concern how geographical proximity or distance is articulated with concepts of belonging and familiarity, or with alterity and strangeness. The key issue, for Frezzo, is that certain forms of activity involve engaging with difference – and it is this, she argues, rather than the mere transcendence of physical distance, which makes them qualify as “mobility.” Thus, she gives the example of a television documentary in which the geographical distance between the current place of residence of a Danish citizen of African descent and the place where her African ancestors lived is treated as a distance of no consequence, insofar as it is presented as a journey “home” in search of her roots. Conversely, a district of Copenhagen inhabited mainly by black immigrants is presented as an unfamiliar enclave of civilizational alterity for most Danes, despite its spatial proximity. Thus in the first case, physical distance is translated into metaphorical proximity whereas, in the second, physical proximity is articulated as metaphorical distance.¹⁶

Communications and Geography – European and North American Traditions

The great geographer of Europe itself, Fernand Braudel, remarked on “the prime importance of communication” noting that “no civilisation can survive without mobility” and, indeed that civilization itself is in large part “a matter of roads, ports and quays.”¹⁷ There is, furthermore, a history of communications in the European Marxist tradition which recognizes that, in the transition from the local economies of feudalism to the wider spaces of the capitalist world market, communications came to play a central and constitutive role whereby “information [was] to capital as lubricant is to the machine.” This tradition has been best developed in recent years by Armand Mattelart.¹⁸ He starts from the premise that contemporary media theory is bedeviled by having lost its historical roots in a tradition that originally included within its remit issues such as the cultural, economic, and political role of shipping, canals, road systems, and railways.¹⁹ My argument is that a new version of such a perspective has much to offer to an analysis of today’s (material and virtual) communications and transport networks, and

their role in the geopolitical dynamics of the contemporary world, in relation to the constitution of both online and off-line territories.²⁰

If Marx and Engels, de la Haye and Mattelart constitute the European lineage of one approach to a materialist theory of communications, there is also a North American version of this tradition, with a rather different theoretical basis, which has its roots in the work of scholars such as Harold Innis, and James Carey – a tradition now reinvigorated, in the wake of Carey's death, by a new generation of scholars.²¹ Carey's remarkable essay on the historical significance of the invention of the telegraph as the moment in which symbolic communications were for the first time separated from the limitations of physical transport has, in recent years, come to be seen as something of a potential "keystone" for a whole new thread of historically inflected, materialist work in communications studies.²² Recently, the work of Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski referred to in the Introduction, has emphasized the importance of studying the material infrastructures on which the distribution of all forms of communication signals depend – the "resources, technologies, labour... that are required to shape... and sustain the distribution of audiovisual signal traffic on global, national and local scales," paying attention to these infrastructures' "entanglements with environmental and geopolitical conditions" and their tendency to be "concentrated in particular locations and spread across vast distances."²³

However, as long ago as 1937, Grover Whalen, the head of the New York World's Fair planning committee, offered a celebratory vision of how radio, movies, automobiles, and airplanes were already stitching together a newly democratic national culture in the United States, characterized by connectivity and an expanding sense of mobility, in what came to be characterized as an "age of super-contact."²⁴ The early twentieth century had, he said, "witnessed a dramatic acceleration in network-building, that occurred as highways and broadcast signals criss crossed the nation, linking homes and everyday routines into sprawling communicative circuits." In this process, people were understood as being not only "wired into a national community, but paved into one as well" along a complementary network of roads and broadcast signals, insofar as the overall communications infrastructure provided by broadcast networks, radio manufacturers, carmakers, and airlines was composed of asphalt and steel, as well as signals on the electromagnetic spectrum. Within this perspective "technologies from the automobile to broadcasting, railroads and newspapers were commonly contextualised in terms of one another" as complementary modes of connectivity, enabling, extending, and managing the new flows of information, people and goods.²⁵ This approach is founded on a capacious definition of communications as involving all "channels of movement by which an entity, whether a verbal utterance or a box car loaded with freight, could be relayed from one point to another." The great advantage is

that this enables us to comprehend the dynamics of a broad range of technologies that all display the capacity to “combine and integrate” across a variety of communication and transport platforms in a “converging web of communications media,” threading ethereal, mediated contact together with physical forms of extended mobility.²⁶

However, in recent years, the discipline of communication studies has, in fact, come to focus exclusively on the mediated forms of the symbolic, institutional, and technological dimensions of the transmission of information. This approach, which simply equates communications with its symbolic or rhetorical dimension, is based on the ontological assumption that communications is principally an immaterial process involving intangible phenomena. To that extent, today’s restricted definition of communications simply follows Diderot’s initiating equation of the science of communicating with “rhetoric” at the level of discourse.²⁷

Nowadays, the analysis of the movement of people and commodities has largely been relegated to the discipline of transport studies and remains neglected by communications scholars. By contrast, my own view²⁸ is that it is impossible to understand the full significance of communications technologies if we take a media-centric approach rather than situating them in their broader social and economic, political and cultural contexts, and in particular, in relation to questions of transport.²⁹ A similar perspective has also recently been advocated by Jonathan Sterne, who argues for a definition of the field of communication studies as involving a variety of material and immaterial forms of “organised movement and action.” To view matters thus is also to support Colin Divall and George Revill’s argument in favor of seeing “transport itself [as] an order-building intermediary … an organiser, regulator and generator of things, places, flows and people.”³⁰

Transport cannot be reduced to a set of narrowly functional economic calculations, and transport policies have many noneconomic determinations. If we now return to Whalen’s perspective on communications infrastructures, it is clear that the construction of the North American highway system, following the Federal Highways Act of 1956, was heavily influenced by President Eisenhower’s postwar experience of the German autobahn system and can only be fully understood in this context. Reversing the terms of Al Gore’s famous “information superhighways” metaphor, Rupert Cornwell has argued that “like an early concrete-and-tarmac version of the internet, these new-fangled superhighways linked [the] continent [and] helped generate the single national market that unleashed the post-war US economy.”³¹ Just as the interstate highway system in the United States, and later, the basic infrastructure of the Internet, were initially planned by reference to issues of national security, so air transportation was, in many countries, developed in the first place as a way of achieving political goals concerning the integration of national or imperial territories – thus during the postcolonial period, many of the newly independent nations, in turn, made it a priority to create their own airlines.³²

The conventional perspectives on infrastructure starts from the premise that it constitutes the (usually invisible) substratum on which the mechanisms of everyday life depend – the pipes and sewers that enable the functioning of a domestic water supply system or the cables on which your computer or television ultimately depends. However, Brian Larkin has recently offered an analysis which supplements this by recognizing that invisibility is only one aspect of infrastructure – and there are other moments in which what he calls the “poetic” function of infrastructure come to the fore. This, he argues, is the case insofar as infrastructures often come to symbolize – and constitute a visible display of – desired attributes such as progress or modernity. To this extent, he argues, we should also be aware of the many varieties of infrastructural fetishism displayed in many parts of the world in the policies of states concerned to produce among their populations the political effect of a sense of awe and fascination – by means of what Larkin calls “imaginative investments” in highly visible technologies. There are many examples – the miles of empty road built by the Albanian government when there were very few cars to drive on them; the national versions of satellite technology worked on by Indonesian and Lebanese rocket scientists of an earlier era, which were pursued principally for symbolic advantage in the age of the “Space Race”; and so on. To this extent, Larkin claims, besides their functional effects, infrastructures should also be understood as “meta-pragmatic objects, signs of themselves deployed in particular circulatory regimes to establish sets of effects” – principally, of making the citizens feel pride in their nation’s modernity. Indeed, he describes British policies in respect of building an infrastructure of railways, telephones satellite towers, and electricity-generating dams in Nigeria as being a way of “producing a particular sort of modern colonial subject ... Technologically adept, forward thinking, mutable, this subject was formed by the criss-crossing of new communications networks. Railways, roads, and radio broadcasts were... to bring into being a technologically mediated subject ... open to the education, knowledge and ideas travelling along this new architecture of communication.”³³

Communications, Transport, and Mobilities: Intersections

In arguing for a return to the more capacious understanding of communication, as opposed to its contemporary reduction to the processes of signification, representation, and meaning, I follow Mattelart’s argument in favor of rethinking communication as a material element in the production of places and territories and the facilitation of the smooth circulation of people, goods, and culture.³⁴ This perspective sees communication as a process of orchestration and assemblage of symbolic and material technologies in the production

of social space, constructing (and inhibiting) different patterns of discourse, and modalities of interaction and mobility.³⁵ Here, transport networks and services must be understood as “sculpt[ing] landscapes of differential accessibility and ...value” by making particular places more or less accessible.³⁶

I will return to these issues in more detail in Chapter 2 in my discussion of the role of transport and communications networks in the construction of political communities in Europe.

Within this broader framework, we can then attend not only to the visible flows of bodies, objects, and signs, but also to the way in which the relevant institutional and infrastructural frameworks, while less immediately visible, exert their influence in enabling, channeling, and regulating these movements.³⁷ To take an example from the study of “mobile” technologies, Katherine Hayles argues that the key issue is the interrelationship of mobile technologies and located infrastructures. As Hayles notes, rather than focusing simply on how we use the GPS/mobile devices at our disposal, we must recognize that their functioning (in terms of capacity, quality of reception, and dependability) is entirely dependent on physically located infrastructures. The crucial questions then are, “where that infrastructure is located, within what territorial boundaries, who owns it and who operates it.”³⁸ Thus, alongside the study of mobile phone users, we also need a geography of the infrastructure that both enables and shapes these mobile interactions.

Material and Virtual Networks

Although he puts the point in overly deterministic terms, Lefebvre is in many senses right when he argues that “paths are more important than the traffic they bear, because they are what endure.”³⁹ The routes constituted by both geographical and media landscapes structure our actions in the world, if in different ways – the first by means of guiding the physical expenditures of effort and resources that are required to overcome the “friction” of both material and social distance; the second by constructing a semiotic web of representations that constitute the taken for granted pathways that guide our everyday lives, focusing on and privileging our recognition of certain kinds of possibilities and conversely, limiting or obscuring our recognition of others.⁴⁰

Rather than focusing simply on the symbolic dimensions of communications, while relegating transportation to the status of the merely functional, we must recognize, with Sterne, that “there are instrumental and constitutive dimensions to [both] communications and transportation.” In relation to the constitutive role of communications, the “annihilation” of time and space has variously been attributed, at different stages, to communications technologies such as the telegraph, the telephone, the satellite, and the Internet and to transportation technologies such as the train, the road network, ocean-going liners,

and air transport. Our object of study must thus be defined so as to incorporate both these dimensions. Thus Raymond Williams' crucial concept of "mobile privatisation" refers not only to technologies of symbolic communications but also, as Sterne observes to "cars, cameras, appliances, wires, airwaves, buildings, messages, movements, images, ideas and sounds ... as a whole social complex of practices."⁴¹

If we take the case of the railway, its invention cannot be understood simply as that of a technical device. Rather, what Christian Wolmar describes as the crucial innovation – the "placing of a steam engine on custom built tracks" has to be understood in the broader context of the social and financial changes (such as the new availability of capital for investment in scientific inventions) that constituted the Industrial Revolution. From this perspective, the railway is best understood as a "machine ensemble" constituted not only by the material vehicles, their forms of power, and the rails on which they run but also by a system of discursive practices such as timetabling, ticketing, signaling, and communication.⁴² In the end, all forms of communications must be understood as involving hybrid "assemblages" of communications technologies and transport systems, such as "trains and telegraph lines, radio and phone lines ... a confluence of coaxial cables for increased telephone traffic and network television, combined with ... highways and later, satellites ... along with plans for internet infrastructures to make use of abandoned railroad rights-of-way."⁴³

Neither physical transport nor communications media are simply machines. Nor is technology outside of social processes. It does not consist simply of things positioned in space but is a "spatial practice temporarily and provisionally stabilised through social institutions and meanings."⁴⁴ Thus, printing, like any other technology, is "not simply a ... technique ... but a set of activities fostering the enrolment of various kinds of actants into heterogeneous networks." Similarly, "a telephone is not just a device, but a means of folding together the far and the near, the alien and the familiar" and its "invention" also involved the development of a variety of social relations embedded in "patents, laboratories, telephone directories, and accountancy systems." From this perspective, the Internet is best seen as "a heterogeneous assemblage of codes, user-controlled hardware, shared infrastructure, protocols, files, codes, skills, task-oriented knowledge, 'netiquette', venture capital, corporate investment, consumer expenditure and diverse other components." By the same token, the functioning of any given technological device will vary according to cultural context, because a medium is not simply defined by its technical capacities but by "the complex heterogeneous network of relations between people, technologies, money, ideas and elements of place."⁴⁵

However, if it is important to situate communication and cultural processes within a material and corporeal landscape, we should nonetheless avoid what John Durham Peters has called the "rhetorical blackmail" involved in the kind of "more materialist than thou" bullying with which fundamentalist Marxists

have often berated those whom they dismiss as “idealists” for failing to grasp the supposed *realpolitik* of communication.⁴⁶ Rather than rejecting questions of textuality and meaning in favor of the “real world” of politics, economics, and technology, our task is to grasp both the materiality of symbolic discourses and the symbolic dimension of material objects and structures. Moreover, we must note that beneath the so-called bottom line of economic processes there lies a cultural framework of trust without which they cannot function.⁴⁷ In summary, my principal concern is to try to indicate, if only schematically, what kind of analytical benefits might accrue from the restoration of the broken linkage between the analysis of symbolic and physical modes of communication. However, in arguing for the better integration of the analysis of symbolic communications and material forms of transport, I am not arguing for their reduction to some uniform set of analytical laws.⁴⁸

The Multidimensionality/Simultaneity of Complex Networks

From the perspective I am proposing, our object of analysis should be the multiple presence of various communications patterns/networks in different dimensions of the same space. Only thus can we effectively construct a multi-dimensional model of communications and mobility at (literally) different levels and in all its different forms, below, on, and above ground. An excellent model for this type of approach was provided by Richard Wentworth’s exhibition exploring the simultaneous existence of overlaying pathways of communications and transport networks, with origins in different historical epochs, still in existence in the Kings Cross area of London: sewers, passages, tunnels, underground rivers, canals, roads, railways, bus and taxi routes, railways, public footpaths – and above them, the air corridors in the sky.⁴⁹ However, even this exemplary model still only addresses transport links in their physical dimension and should, ideally, be complemented by a survey of all the forms of “symbolic communications” in play in the area as well, thus adding in all the electric cables, phone lines, telegraph wires, and now Wi-Fi networks, which also crisscross a given space. As the NL Design Collective argue, “Where once we bought, or claimed rights, in extra-territorial waters, with radio telephony, air travel and television an immense trade in ‘air’ has arisen. Wave frequencies, air routes and the space above buildings are [now] the goods of speculative trade – the... ‘front lines’ in [an] air war.”⁵⁰

Clearly, it would be quite impractical to attempt to do this kind of analysis exhaustively, in each situation to be studied as it would replicate all the difficulties implicit in any utopian vision of a “holistic” mode of study of all dimensions of communication in everyday life. However, while choices of what to focus on in any particular situation must always be made, we must recognize

the complexity of the setting from which we are abstracting some particular dimension of communication – only thus can we achieve a self-reflexive awareness of the limits of our analyses. One good parallel with Wentworth's ambitious model of simultaneity of the various dimensions of mobility/flow is provided by the work of the Swiss video artist Ursula Biemann. Her work is concerned with the intersections of data flows, flows of commodities, technologies, natural resources, and people, and her ambition is to show how the dynamics of local microgeographies of everyday mobility are intermeshed with global and transnational systems.

Speaking of the way in which borders offer a compressed form for studying the dynamics of these various flows, she takes as one example the Straits of Gibraltar, as a veritable “bottleneck” of such flows. As she notes, the area is traversed

by container ships en route from West Africa to the Mediterranean, by boats transporting migrants on their perilous nocturnal journeys, by helicopter patrols keeping watch, by radio waves and radar lines, by itinerant plantation workers who pick vegetables for the EU market, by commuting housemaids going to work for the señoritas of Andalusia, by border guard controls on the mountain passes, by buses transporting Moroccan women to Tangier where they peel Dutch shrimps to be shipped back to Holland ... by pirates who procure goods from China and by women smugglers who hide these goods under their skirts and carry them into the Medina.⁵¹

For her, as for Wentworth, what is needed is a multiperspectival approach that is capable of seeing how these different dimensions of mobility are articulated (or indeed, in conflict) with each other, at both micro and macro levels.

Notes

1 *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, s.v. “Communications” (1964).

2 A. Trachtenberg, Foreword, in W. Schivelbusch (1977) *The Railway Journey*, University of California Press, pp. xiv. 40; 121. K. Marx (1972) *Grundrisse*, Penguin, p. 534.

3 Y. de la Haye (ed) (1980) *Marx & Engels on the Means of Communication*, International General.

4 R. Arnheim (1933) *Film as Art*, quoted in C.D. Rath (1985) *The Invisible Network*, in P. Drummond and R. Paterson (eds.), *Television in Transition*, British Film Institute, p. 199.

5 J. Sterne (2006) *Transportation and Communication*, in J. Packer and C. Robertson (eds.), *Thinking with James Carey*, Peter Lang, p. 118; B. Latour (1996) *Aramis or The Love of Technology*, Harvard University Press, p. 59.

6 Cf. Sarah Sharma (2008) *Taxis As Media: A Temporal Materialist Reading of the Taxi*, *Social Identities* 14 (4), 459–460.

7 Cf. McLuhan (1964) *Understanding Media*, McGraw Hill.

8 Evidently the key difference is that both the car and the television (and the living room in which it is customarily consumed) involve modes of private/individualized consumption, whereas the railway and the cinema are fundamentally public modes of communication. B. Bachmair (1991) From the Motor Car to Television, *Media Culture and Society* 13, 522, 525.

9 See T. Davies (1984) Transports of Pleasure, in T. Bennett (ed.), *Formations of Pleasure*, Routledge. I am indebted to Bill Schwarz for this example. These issues are also explored in the work of the conceptual artist Katie Paterson who provides an interesting meditation on the nature of metaphorical conversions. Her work transforms cosmic events, such as the circulation of heavenly bodies (the movement of the moon and the stars or of lightning) into the mundane everyday logistics of transport (Fedex® parcels, mobile phone messages, street illumination). As Brian Dillon notes in his commentary on her work, these metaphors “like curiosity, wonder or the adventure of discovery, take us out of ourselves, and deposit us at some distant remove (or) make distant things seem close and immediate” (B. Dillon (2013) Signs and Wonders: On Katie Paterson’s “In Another Time,” Mead Gallery, Warwick University, unpaginated).

10 Cf. Paul Theroux’s discussion of the experience of train travel as one in which the train window “frames” the passing landscape as if it were a composed view “holding the scene for moment, makes it a picture” (P. Theroux (1975) *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Hamish Hamilton, p. 28). In describing the experience of travel on paddle steamers on the Mississippi River in the nineteenth century, passengers reported a similar sense of viewing “passing scenes” – as if it were the landscape, rather than them, which was in motion. See also G. Votalato (2007) *Transport Design*, Reaktion Books, p. 106.

11 Jean Baudrillard quoted in A. Friedberg (2002) Urban Mobility and Cinematic Visuality, *Journal of Visual Culture* 1 (2), 186; cf. M. Morse (1990) An Ontology of Everyday Distraction, in P. Mellencamp (ed.), *The Logics of Television*, Indiana University Press. See also the work of the architects Elisabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio on the architecture of “fenestration” and visuality – see A. Betsky, L. Anderson, and K. Hays (eds.) (2003) *Scanning The Aberant Archtecures of diller + scofidio*, Whitney Museum of American Art. In the case of air travel, screen-based in-flight entertainment systems are principally designed to “deliver” passengers from the monotony of flying by segmenting the featureless nature of the suspended time of the flight and reorienting the passenger’s sensibilities away from their restricted seat space by transporting them to a more pleasurable frame of mind. See N. Govil (2004) Something Spatial in the Air, in N. Couldry and A. McCarthy (eds.), *MediaSpace*, Routledge, pp. 233–252.

12 See my discussion later in this chapter of Rupert Cornwell’s analogy between the role of the “highway” in its material form and that of the information “superhighways” in the constitution of nation and community.

13 G. Lakoff (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press.

14 See Chapter 3 for my further discussion of this point and cf. S. Ahmed (1999) *Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2(3).

15 Cf. B. Frerello (2008) Towards a Discursive and Analytics of Movement, *Mobilities* 3 (1), 27.

16 Frerello Towards a Discursive, 29, 35–47; cf. Heidegger on a “world without distance” where everything is “neither near nor far” in M. Heidegger (1971) *The Thing*, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper and Row. See also K. Robins and F. Webster (1999) *Times of the Technoculture*, Routledge, on how space-transcending communications technologies could only “bring us together” if it was merely geographical distance which divided us.

17 F. Braudel (1995) *A History of Civilisations*, Penguin, pp. 10, 5.

18 De la Haye, *Marx & Engels*, p. 29; A. Mattelart (1996) *The Invention of Communication*, University of Minnesota Press; cf. also Mattelart (2000) *Networking the World 1794–2000*, University of Minnesota Press.

19 W. Schivelbusch (1977) *The Railway Journey*, University of California Press; F. Ratzel (1897) *Politische Geographie*, quoted in Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, p. 209.

20 G.O. Tuathail, S. Dalby, and P. Routledge (1998) *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge.

21 Cf. J. Packer and C. Robertson (eds.) (2006) *Thinking with James Carey*, Peter Lang; J. Packer and S.B. Crofts Wiley (eds.) (2012) *Communication Matters*, Routledge.

22 J. Durham Peters (2006) Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph Reconsidered, in Packer and Robertson, *Thinking with James Carey*, pp. 137–155.

23 L. Parks and N. Starosielski (eds.) (2014) Introduction, in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, University of Illinois Press.

24 Comparable to contemporary ideas of perpetual contact; G. Whalen, quoted on p. 459 in R. Popp (2011) Machine Age Communication: Media, Transportation and Contact in the Interwar United States, *Technology and Culture*, 52 (3) (July), 459–484.

25 Popp, Machine Age Communication, 462, 471, 476, 474, 460.

26 Popp, Machine Age Communication, 460; Burgess, quoted in Popp, Machine Age Communication, 465.

27 Cf. J. Packer and S.B. Crofts Wiley (2012) The Materiality of Communication, in *Communication Matters*, Routledge; Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, p. 193.

28 Cf. D. Morley (2009) For a Materialist, Non Media-Centric Media Studies, *Television and New Media* 10 (1).

29 See also P.D. Murphy (2005) Fielding the Study of Reception, *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture* 3, 167–180.

30 Sterne, Transportation and Communication, p. 118; C. Divall and G. Revill (2005) Cultures of Transport, *Journal of Transport History* 26 (1), 105; M. Akrich and B. Latour (1992) A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Nonhuman Assemblies, in W. Bijker and J. Law (eds.), *Shaping Technology/Building Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press; quoted in Divall and Revill Cultures of Transport, 99–111. This approach is also in line with Akrich and Latour's proposals for a “material semiotics,” concerned with the study of “how meaning is built ... in its original, non-textual and non-linguistic interpretation: how a privileged trajectory is built out of an indefinite number of possibilities” centrally involving “the study of order-building ... or path-building.”

31 R. Cornwell (2006) The US Salutes the Super-Highway, *Independent on Sunday* (July 2), p. 40. Evidently, the same mode of analysis could be applied to the later construction of the British motorway system, from the 1960s onwards, even if such spectacular results cannot be claimed for it.

32 J.P. Rodrigue, C. Comtois, and B. Slack (2006) *The Geography of Transport Systems*, Routledge, pp. 109, 228.

33 B. Larkin (2013) The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, 333, 336. Brian Larkin (2008) *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, Duke University Press, p. 21.

34 See Mattelart, The Invention of Communication and J. Packer and S.B. Crofts Wiley, *Communication Matters*, pp. 11–12.

35 Cf. J. Hay (2006) Between Cultural Materialism and Spatial Materialism, in Packer and Robertson (eds.), *Thinking with James Carey*, p. 48.

36 D. McKinnon, G. Pirie, and M. Gather (2008) Transport and Economic Development, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell.

37 Cf. S.B. Crofts Wiley and J. Packer (2010) Rethinking Communication after the Mobilities Turn, *The Communication Review* 13, 263–268.

38 K. Hayles (2012) Media, Materiality and the Human, in Packer and Crofts Wiley, *Communication Matters*, p. 29.

39 H. Lefebvre (1991) *The Production of Space*, Oxford University Press, p. 118.

40 Cf. G. Brolin (2006) Electronic Geographies, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom, pp. 75–76. Of course, to return to the protocols identified in my introduction, following de Certeau as I do, this is not to presume the inevitable success of these preestablished pathways in entirely limiting the “journeys” that their intended users actually undertake.

41 Sterne, Transportation and Communication, p. 124.

42 Cf. Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*; C. Wolmar (2010) *Blood, Iron and Gold: How the Railways Transformed the World*, Atlantic Books.

43 Sterne, Transportation and Communication, pp. 129, 121.

44 P. Adams (2009) *Geographies of Media and Communication*, Wiley Blackwell, p. 191.

45 Adams, *Geographies of Media*, pp. 212, 31, 39, 57; cf. the way in which the distinctive development of the mobile phone in Africa has been influenced by the context of there being no effective landline technology in much of the continent.

46 Cf. the virtual dimensions of physical structures; and the rhetorical dimensions of architecture in directing the movements of a building's inhabitants.

47 Cf. J. Durham Peters (2012) *Becoming Mollusk*, in Packer and Crofts Wiley, *Communication Matters*, p. 41.

48 M. Serres and B. Latour (1995) *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, University of Michigan Press, p. 91 ff. In this connection, we should note Michel Serres' reminder that "the best synthesis takes place on a field of maximal differences" and his corresponding warning against the dangers of "lazy" forms of what he calls "pass-key" analysis, whereby ready-made interpretations, at a high level of abstraction, are paraded as the solution to all problems. Rather, as he observes, if "a single key won't open all locks" and "the best solutions are local, singular, specific" then "each time you try to open a different lock, you have to forge a specific key."

49 R. Wentworth (2002) *An Area of Outstanding Unnatural Beauty*, Artangel.

50 NL Design Collective (2003) *Mobile Minded*, in A. Hoete (ed.), *ROAM: A Reader on the Aesthetics of Mobility*, Black Dog Publishing, p. 320.

51 U. Biemann (2010) Logging the Border: *Europlex*, in *Mission Reports: Artistic Practices in the Field/Video Works 1998–2008* Bildsmuseet/Arnolfini Gallery, p. 48.

2

Constituting Europe

Empires, Nations, and Techno-zones

Communications and Empire: Telegraphs, Cables, and Networks

Let me now offer a way of focusing the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier by exploring, in more detail, the role of communications in the constitution of empires, nations, and regions. To some considerable extent, this requires a historical perspective if we are to rewrite the paradigm of communication studies so as to transcend its (currently often exclusive) focus on the newest communications technologies. Although, as explained in my introduction, one of this book's founding commitments is to the avoidance of EurAm centrism, I nonetheless take the historic role of communications and transport in the construction of Europe itself as my case study in this chapter. As I have argued elsewhere, following Dipesh Chakrabarty, the project of "provincializing Europe" – and thus demoting it from the position of centrality we usually see as axiomatic – does not necessarily involve ignoring it but rather approaching it in a different way in order to defamiliarize our taken for granted perspectives on the matter. In this, I follow not only the "relativizing" anthropological perspectives advocated by Brian Larkin, but also Braudel's historical perspective, which advocates the advantages of coming to see the familiar face of the European continent in a different light if we contextualize it alongside the analysis of how things are elsewhere.¹

In their trenchant critique of the regrettable absence of any significant historical perspective in much media theory, Graham Murdock and Michael Pickering rightly argue that, in its overwhelming emphasis on the wonders of the communications technologies of our era, much of it falls into a form of "cultural presentism." Such work tends to neglect the profound historical continuities that still shape contemporary developments.² Similarly, Dwayne Winseck and Robert Pike note that, far from being rendered obsolete by the advent of wireless and transcontinental telephony, the undersea cable system

laid down in the late nineteenth century as the basis of international telegraphy (if now in its fiber-optic form) still provides the basis of our contemporary system of global communications.³ In this connection, James Carey's canonical work on the invention of the telegraph as the key moment when communications was first effectively separated from transport has also functioned as the inspiration for Tom Standage's argument that insofar as it was the dots and dashes of Morse code which constituted the original "binarisation" of all information, the dawn of the digital age itself should properly be back-dated to that point in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴

As Jill Hills argues, by allowing the transfer of information across international borders, the introduction of the telegraph "completely transformed the mechanisms of overseas trade and investment," leading to a major paradigm shift in communications that extended the "space of empire" and can be seen to have ushered in the first phase of what we today describe as the era of globalization. She demonstrates how the construction and regulation of these systems has always been shaped by changing structures of international relations and, in particular, the shift in the balance of power between Europe and America over the last 150 years. In close parallel with Hills, Winseck and Pike argue that "policies established in the nineteenth century continue to shape the relationship between the global media and empire in our own time." They are concerned with the formative years of the rise of the global media system constituted by the worldwide network of submarine cables, domestic telegraph systems, and global news agencies. For them, as for Hills, this period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, up to the outbreak of the First World War, can be seen as the *belle époque* of early globalization. They rightly insist not only that "the media of this era were more global and organised as a system than is often assumed," but also that today's global media system took its initial shape at this moment, as key players from the telegraph industry parlayed their domestic strengths into positions at its apex.⁵

While the late nineteenth century saw the beginnings of these international versions of these networks, not least with the laying of the international undersea telegraph cables, they were all centered on London as the prime city of the world economy. Britain's Victorian imperial hegemony had itself been "materialized" by laying of the undersea cables linking together the various dispersed parts of the British Empire. At that point, as Mattelart notes, the cable system of the Victorian Empire "accounted for two thirds of the world network" and further enhanced the previously established supremacy of the British Navy and of the London-based commercial shipping lines.

It was in the context of this massively London-centric network of communications that the major international conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries developed. In particular, German desires (as articulated by the Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck) to get the better of London's internationally dominant position across the major networks of long-distance

communication focused in particular on short-circuiting Britain's control of the Suez Canal by building an overland access route to the Indies and the Far East. The German imperial plan was to capitalize on Berlin's already central position within Europe, as the crossroads of the major north-south and east-west railway lines, by building a Berlin-Byzantium-Baghdad railway intended to run on to Basra and thus enable an overseas connection with Bombay. In the build-up to the First World War, Germany thus made an alliance with the declining Ottoman Empire permitting the creation of a cable and railway link from Berlin through Turkey to Baghdad and onwards towards the Persian Gulf as a means of bypassing Suez and thus undermining Britain's control of the Indian Ocean. Here we see reflected in state policy the strategies articulated by Friedrich Ratzel concerning the ways in which the construction of infrastructures facilitating "the movement of people and goods information from one place to another" were fundamental to the "mastery of space" that lay at the heart of the German school of geopolitics.⁶ The struggle for control over communications and transport links was central to the First World War: indeed, Britain's cutting of the transatlantic cables that linked Germany to the West was one of the first official (and highly symbolic) acts of that war.

Improving Circulation: Building the Nation with Canals, Roads, and Railways

In his study of the history of communication in Europe, Armand Mattelart insists on framing communications within the broader context of ideas of reason, progress, the perfectibility of society, and the government of space. Taking the development of France from the seventeenth century onwards as his case study, he demonstrates how improved communication routes, initially in the form of canals and roads and later in the form of railways, constituted the basis for the unification of the domestic market and thus the territory of the nation. As he puts it, in this process, the speed and efficiency of technical networks of communication gradually came to be the crucial standard by which "progress" itself was measured.⁷

This emphasis on communications in its broadest sense was initially developed in France by François Quesnay and the physiocrats of the late eighteenth century, who emphasized the importance of the improvement of transport in order to enhance the flow of wealth, just as Denis Diderot had emphasized the importance of the free communication of thoughts and opinions as a means of "vitalizing" the nation. The physiocrats' slogan, "Laissez faire, laissez passer," applied not only in the matter of free trade and the free flow of goods and labor but also in the matter of the free flow of information. Evidently, this model of the importance of improved transportation was based on the anatomical metaphor of the importance of the free circulation of the blood to the health of

the body. Once it had become accepted that it was the “absence of a fluid and coherent system of communication” that constituted the major obstacle to social and economic development, new transport policies were developed, firstly for linking the navigable rivers of the nation by means of canals.⁸ These rivers and canals, once interlinked then constituted a star-shaped network, based on the capital of the country, that provided the template for the shape of subsequent national networks of physical transportation, whether in the form of roads or railways. In all of this, insofar as the building of canals, roads, bridges, and railways was seen as crucial to the unification of the nation, the engineer then became seen as the “privileged servant of reason” in that he facilitated the improved communication necessary to national progress.⁹ Evidently, this whole approach was based on the assumption that “communication, exchange and motion bring to humanity enlightenment and progress” and that isolation and disconnection are the obstacles to civilization and progress that must be overcome as much as the “health and vitality of social institutions” is seen to be dependent on efficient circulatory system – hence the emphasis given in all the “world exhibitions” of the late nineteenth century to the contributions to progress and civilization made by the industries of communication and transportation.¹⁰

In France, after the revolution, the state was particularly concerned to universalize the customs and language of the nation so as to break down the barriers created by specific local cultures and thus solidify national unity. In all of this, communication technologies played a crucial role, and the semaphore telegraph (invented by the Chappe brothers in 1794) served to link the capital city with the other principal towns of the nation and, most particularly, with the fortresses on its borders. The innovation was understood as “a means which tends to consolidate the unity of the Republic through the close and rapid contact it allows all parties” right across the geographical territory of the nation.¹¹ The strategies developed for uniting the nation and overcoming the isolation of the provinces depended precisely on their operationalization in both the material and the virtual realms. Here, new strategies for the gravelling of roads worked in conjunction with new regulations for the elimination of regional patois. Unity was to be achieved not simply through the construction of a national system for the transmission of signs but also by the adoption of standardized systems of weights, measures, and money to replace their previously distinct local forms with the exclusive use of the metric system, which was designed to ensure that the whole nation came to “share the same perceptions of space dimension and weight” and thus to create “new bonds of general fraternity”¹²

At the level of communications infrastructures, this process was further intensified in the nineteenth century, throughout the nations of Europe, by the development of national railway systems based on standard national gauges and of the nationalized forms of time necessary for their coordination.

Furthermore, the railway system was understood not simply as a particular mode of transport but as part of a general remodeling of the social world based on the principle of the acceleration of circulation – not only of information (the telegraph) but also of commodities (the birth of the department store) and of pedestrian and mechanized traffic. These sentiments were often expressed in an effusive manner. Pierre Larousse claimed that a “magical aura” surrounds the very word “railway” as a synonym for civilisation progress and fraternity. Jules Michelet spoke of the railway as being “for everyone’s use, bringing France together and bringing Lyons and Paris into communion with one another.”¹³ Similarly, Goethe was an early supporter of developing efficient transport systems for the unification of Germany, writing in 1824 that “railways, express mails, steamboats and all possible means of communication are what the educated world seeks,” and in the German case, the railways came to play a particularly important role in transforming its 39 states into a single nation.

Some early commentators evinced utopian hopes that communal journeys on trains would “inspire the sentiment and habits of equality and liberty … by causing all classes of society to travel together … [and thus]… advance the reign of truly fraternal social relations.”¹⁴ However, the rapid development of very clearly distinguished classes of transportation, with very different conditions of travel available at very different prices, rapidly undermined any such prospects. Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was already mocking those who imagined that the creation of railways would realize universal peace – as if improvements in the speed of transportation would effectively reduce not only the distance between places but also the social distance between classes.¹⁵

The new systems of long-distance communication, such as the railways and the telegraph, were thus understood not as just technical facilities but, rather, as the basis of a “higher form” of national solidarity, insofar as citizens would then be able to communicate their news and their desires to each other instantaneously, effectively reproducing, but now on a national scale, the conditions of the Greek agora. This has been a persistent dream: it can be argued that in the twentieth century, the French (resolutely national) proto-Internet system “Minitel” was designed with exactly the same object in mind.

Europe as the “Pivot of History”? Constructing the Eurozone

To return to the international perspective on geopolitics outlined earlier, it is worth noting that in 1904 Halford Mackinder, the doyen of British imperialist geographers, wrote an article that identified Europe as what he called the “geographical pivot” of history. More precisely, he spoke of the “pivot region of the world’s politics” as being “that vast area of Euro-Asia which is inaccessible

to ships ... [which] ... in Antiquity lay open to the [invasion of] the horseriding nomads and is today about to be covered with a network of railways." Mackinder's perspective does not view Europe as a freestanding entity but argues that "European history is subordinate to Asia" insofar as, from the time of the Mongol invasions and the Crusades onwards, European civilization was formed in and against the threat of Asiatic invasion. All this, of course, was quite transformed by the development of European sea power in the Columbian "age of discovery," which allowed the European powers to outflank their enemies to the east. Mobility is central to Mackinder's analysis throughout – whether that enabled by the horse, by the longboat, by sail, or, at a later stage, by the railway and the steamship. For him, the epochal changes in geopolitical dynamics all involve the role of new modes of transport in transforming relations of power between and within geographical regions.¹⁶

The reconstitution of Europe throughout the late twentieth century can usefully be seen in similar, if less dramatic, geopolitical terms. Thus the creation of the single market in Europe in the early 1990s was a strategy designed to create a supranational market on a sufficiently large scale to enable Europe better to withstand the growing competition from North America and the burgeoning East Asian Economies.¹⁷

This Euro-strategy finds a clear parallel in the earlier nation-building policies developed by the physiocrats and their successors for the suppression of interior customs barriers and tolls, the standardization of the tax system, and the elaboration of a single legal code in France. As early as the first years of the nineteenth century, Saint Simon presented a plan for "The Reorganisation of the European Community" as a mode of guaranteeing peace after the Napoleonic wars.¹⁸ Indeed, the contemporary idea of "Fortress Europe" also has one unfortunate historical root in Hitler's vision of "Festung Europa," as articulated in "Fuhrer Directive 405" of 1944.¹⁹ In the contemporary period, beyond being any kind of natural, geographical fact "Europe" is a discursive construction structured primarily by the European Union's economic and immigration policies, enshrined in the concept of the single market and in the various cultural and media policies developed by the European Union to promote a particular narrative designed to encourage a sense of Europe-wide citizenship.

In pursuit of these objectives from the 1990s onwards, the European Union adopted a range of policies designed to enhance communication and transport networks and to encourage the mobility and accessibility of certain subjects (Europeans), objects (the euro), images (media coverage of EU affairs), symbols (the European flag), and places (cultural capitals) as Ginette Verstraete has argued.²⁰ These policies have had the aim of creating a cultural space that is attractive to both European and international tourism – a "borderless Europe of cultural diversity," constructing narratives that connect Europeannesss to a manufactured "geography of cultural heritage." From a marketing and touristic

point of view, a “consciousness of Europe … has been projected onto specifically … re-ordered cities, regions and landscapes.” Thus, the “European Cities of Culture” scheme has had the aim of unifying “the people of the member states, through the expression of a culture that is both common to all and richly diverse.” Through this scheme, the specific culture of each city was to be made more “accessible” to all Europeans while also enhancing the image of European culture as a whole.²¹ We can usefully understand this as a process of “Europeanization” in which there has been a conscious governmental attempt to create an “imagined community” of European nationals, who are encouraged to engage in various forms of intra-European cultural tourism, such as those sponsored by the “Cities of Culture” program, which has, as one of its explicit aims, making the cultures of each European nation better known to the citizens of the others. In a sense, this whole scheme can be usefully seen as a popularized version of the tradition of the grand tours of the main cultural sites of other European countries enjoyed (rather more exclusively) by the European aristocracy of an earlier age, with the aim of constructing a particular imagined geography of Europe’s shared cultural heritage.

At a cultural level, the European Union’s audiovisual policies have also supported the development of now well-established patterns of trans-European broadcasting such as that enshrined in the annual “Eurovision Song Contest,” which, over many years, has attracted a massive audience (even if substantial parts of it are inclined to an ironic attitude towards the kitsch visions of European culture that it showcases).²²

If the contemporary European project has thus involved the reformatting of a range of technologies and mobility practices designed to produce a new generation of internally mobile European citizens, it has also involved educational policy. The European Union’s “Erasmus” scheme, under which two generations of European students have now been subsidized to study in other European nations, has had, as one of its effects, a profound effect in increasing the rate of transnational marriage between young Europeans, as was foreseen by Umberto Eco at the moment of its inception. Commenting on the scheme’s success, Eco described it as a “sexual revolution” sweeping through the younger generation in Europe that would, over time, transform kinship patterns – and thus attitudes – across the continent. Indeed, given his sense of the transformative potential of the scheme for creating a “new type of European,” he argued it should be radically extended to other categories of European citizens and workers. In the autumn of 2014 the European Commission published a report showing that he was largely right, insofar as more than a quarter of those who had taken part in the Erasmus scheme had met their long-term partner while studying abroad, resulting in the birth of one million Euro babies with parents from different member countries within the Union – a formidable transformation in the European marriage market.²³

At heart, recent EU policy has been based on “coupling mobility to migration, and the freedom of the European to the containment of the ... [outsider]” – allowing the ideal (predominantly white) property-owning European citizenry to enjoy “free movement through a European space without internal frontiers.” All of this was instantiated most clearly in the Schengen protocols, which were intended to “minimise delays caused by traffic congestion and identity checks; stimulate the free and competitive flow of goods, money and people; create a common European market on a scale that would improve productivity, distribution and consumption.”²⁴ In the wake of the Schengen Agreement, European mobility has been structured not only by the European Union’s economic and immigration policies but also by cultural and media policies – such as the subsidies to networks for audiovisual production and distribution – institutionalized in the Eurimages scheme, designed to encourage a sense of European-wide citizenship. The ambition of these policies has been to create a new generation whose sense of a common identity would be enabled across all these discursive and ideological dimensions but also practically enshrined, in more mundane policy initiatives such as “common driving licences, agreements for the provision of healthcare, and a frontier-free mobile phone transmission zone.”²⁵ These effects have been achieved through encouraging the internal mobility of certain types of largely white/Christian (or culturally Christian, and preferably property-owning) European subjects. As Ginette Verstraete observes, these subjects are presumed to have common allegiance to a particular set of economic policies, symbolized by the euro; to motifs and emblems, such as the EU flag now used as a “branding device” on car registrations and civic buildings across its territory; and a “culture in common” based on shared familiarity with certain types of European imagery and media coverage of European affairs.²⁶ European Union policy has thus focused on a series of measures intended to produce infrastructures of (ideally frictionless) mobility in the form of motorways, railways, telecommunications, ports, and harbors – an infrastructure which, as Verstaete observes, is routinely celebrated by the icons of bridges and gateways that figure so prominently on EU coins, representing this idealized vision of a smoothly connected trans-European space.²⁷

Transporting Europeans: High Speed Networking

The European Union has also made considerable effort to achieve greater Euro-integration by means of the standardization and synchronization of all major transport services. One of the key initiatives here has been the development of a network of Trans Europe Express (TGV/ICE) trains between France and Denmark, the Netherlands, and Italy designed as an alternative to flying, on the principle of allowing businessmen to travel between the main cities of

northern Europe fast enough to do a day's work and return the same evening in time for dinner at their family home. This integrated European high speed train system linking the major capital cities in the northwest of the continent certainly reinforces their degree of connectedness. However, by the same token, it also reinforces the relative exclusion of all outlying regions as these high-speed networks effectively relegate the space between the hub-points in the network to second-class status.²⁸ To that extent, the effective heart of Europe is thus being redrawn to the disadvantage of all outlying regions – such as the north of England and the south of Spain and of Italy.²⁹

One of the most dramatic instances of the transformation of a place by virtue of its becoming an important node in a more extensive network is demonstrated in the case of the northern European city of Lille. The city's new function as a strategic node (or "transit lounge") in the European high-speed train network has transformed what was once simply a provincial, regional center into a space of much greater significance by virtue of the fact that it now serves as the connecting junction for the various dense "uber-urbanisms" of northern Europe.³⁰ As Nick Barley notes, "EuraLille's importance lies not in where it is, but where it leads to and how long it takes to get there."³¹ Thus the continent is being reconfigured, spatially and temporally, as cities are pulled towards – or drawn away from – each other, according to the rates of development of their connecting infrastructures.

Now, beyond the boundaries of Europe itself, we also see the creation of interconnected and interoperable trans-European transport systems with the emphasis on longer distance connections and improved cross-border interaction.³² Nonetheless, these policies are still hampered by factors such as remaining national railway gauge differences that restrict the interoperability of member states' rail systems. To take one example, the fateful decision of the Spanish government to choose a different railway gauge from the rest of Europe has long played a significant part of in inhibiting Spain's economic growth and its full incorporation into the communications and transport systems which now constitute the heart of the EU project.³³

Eurostructures: Airports, Bridges, and Borders

Increasingly, we now also see projects for the construction of trans-European transport corridors of a multimodal type, consisting of rail, road, pipeline, and telecommunications routes. However, in all these projects, questions of boundary maintenance continually arise. If we take the case of Amsterdam's Schipol airport, now a key gateway for European air traffic, Tim Cresswell's analysis shows how its systems of passenger flow had to be reconstructed in order to enact the new distinctions between domestic and international travelers instituted by the Schengen agreement. This required the

construction of a new series of checks on passenger flows within the airport, in order to distinguish between those travelling within the jurisdiction of the “Europe” constituted by the Schengen Agreement and those entering it from without.³⁴ This example of the redesign of an airport at a microscale in order to meet the requirements of a political agreement at a continental scale shows how the abstract goal of a new European identity has to be produced through a whole series of technologies and practices of mobility. Thus the new “continental” form of internally borderless space, designed to stimulate the free movement of market forces could only be “operationalised through a multitude of local spatial reorganisations and practices of surveillance,” and it was only thus that “Schengen space was enacted and materially produced.”³⁵

This reorganization of euro-air mobility is part of a broader reformatting of a range of technologies and practices, designed to produce a new generation of European citizens “mobilized” by the removal of customs checks at border crossings, as well as the provision of specific EU channels at airports such as Schipol.³⁶ Here we see the political importance (and uses) of mobility as a way of breaking down various forms of provincialism and facilitating the creation of wider patterns of connection and community – whether at a federal state level (as in the United States) or at continental level, in the case of European Union. If the aeromobility system’s capacity to enable worldwide connections is central to the production of the global order, it is through the synchronization of a multitude of particular mobilities that it is effectively constituted and controlled.³⁷

In some cases, the practical efficiency and the symbolic value of transport facilities in joining together or separating different territories are intertwined in particularly dramatic ways. This can be seen in a very literal sense in the case of the positive effects of the Oresund Bridge, built to create a more integrated region by more effectively joining together the cities of Copenhagen in Denmark and Malmo and the surrounding Skane area of southern Sweden. Today, the bridge (now iconically familiar to many European television viewers from the eponymous Danish series *The Bridge*) both symbolizes and practically constitutes a new “trans-Baltic” social, cultural, and economic “activity space” in that region. However, historical sensitivities about the period when a previous Danish “land-grab” conquered southern Sweden in the seventeenth century are now echoed in Swedish anxieties about the possibility of “losing their identity” as they are increasingly subsumed into the rebranded area of “Greater Copenhagen.”³⁸ Conversely, to turn to the case of the Balkans, one can consider the devastating consequences of the destruction, during the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1993, of the sixteenth-century bridge over the Neretva River in Mostar, which had previously linked the Croatian and Bosnian parts of the town. The town’s “Old Bridge” had been one of the great symbols of the cultural tolerance of the Ottoman period in that region, and its postwar

restoration was an occasion not only for celebration but also for reconsideration of the significance of such architectural forms in cultural life.³⁹

In considering transport infrastructures in the Balkans, we must also note the crucial historical role of the E5 motorway running from southern Europe's borders throughout what was Yugoslavia, from Zagreb to Belgrade and on to Greece and Turkey. This particular road occupies an almost mythical space in recent European history. Grandiosely known both as the International European "E5" road, and officially named by the Yugoslav state as the "Highway of Brotherhood and Unity" (unifying its different ethnic regions and groups), it was known colloquially as the "Autoput" and as the "Boredom Road" by the children of the generations of migrants who drove from southern Europe to the Balkans and back, summer after summer, on their annual trip "home."⁴⁰

Built as an ideological project – and a matter of national pride, as much as a practical necessity – between 1949 and 1985, it was initially financed by reparations from Germany for damage to the country's infrastructure during the Second World War and constructed by Tito's Communist youth with the help of idealistic brigades of young volunteer helpers from overseas.⁴¹ The road also played a key role in the constitution of Yugoslavia itself as a nation. As one of Angela Melitopoulos' interviewees in her "Timescapes" project puts it, "as the road connected the [different] Republics, there was the idea of really connecting people as well." Thus, he remembers, it produced "the feeling to be a Yugoslav ... [it was] a place of meeting different people ... the youngsters were ... building railways, autobahns, highways, everything that was needed to rebuild Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War."⁴² The road, which had linked the republics, was badly damaged by the subsequent wars which wrecked the region in the 1990s, and for many years afterwards its continuing state of disrepair offered both a profound symbol and a very practical index of the destruction of the "brotherhood" of ethnicities that had constituted Yugoslavia. More recently (since the summer of 2015), the road has acquired a new function as the notorious route of long-distance pilgrimage along which bedraggled groups of refugees from the chaos of the Middle East and Africa trudge northwards on foot, hoping for asylum at the European Union's southeastern border.

Europe as Techno-zone: The Politics of Technology

Taking a Foucauldian perspective, Andrew Barry takes recent EU communications and transport policy as a test case of how governmentality is inevitably a technical matter of regulating the communications infrastructure to maximize the "productive" forms of mobility within a territory.⁴³ His concern is with how the borders of transnational zones of governance such as the European Union's single market are formed technologically. As he notes,

for any territory to function cohesively, the relevant technical devices (plug sockets, phone cables, railway lines, etc.) and practices need to be made compatible by the establishment of common standards. To this extent, EU policy since the late 1980s has been designed to establish a frame within which a vast array of previously disparate technological activities now take a more or less standardized form.⁴⁴ Thus, if territories and places are connected by making the relevant technologies compatible “standardisation is … above all, a political project.” From this perspective we should think of the European Union not just in terms of notions of political or monetary union, nor simply as a geographical entity – for “the politics of Europe today is, in many respects, a politics of technology… [and] … Europe itself is a technological arrangement.”⁴⁵

The policy of “harmonization,” which became the central theme of EU concern in the 1980s in the build-up to the institution of the single market in 1992, was concerned to move beyond the simple notions of “assimilation” enshrined in the Treaty of Rome, on the basis of which what became the European Union had been constituted in the 1950s. Up to that point, Barry argues, Europe had only existed “as a space fractured by an array of legal, administrative, technical and linguistic barriers” in which “the movement of individuals objects and information was inhibited by petty bureaucratic rules reflecting national idiosyncrasies.” It was a space littered with obstacles and impurities that the 1992 project was designed to eliminate in order to create, so far as possible, a friction-free zone of flows of productive trade and mobility. In this context, the key thing that Europe required was a more effective information and communication infrastructure in order to compete effectively with the information superhighways already in place in North America. Thus the European Union has played the role of an *animateur state*, improving the material infrastructure of communications and harmonizing protocols and technical standards wherever possible so as to enable consumers and citizens to participate more effectively as active Euro-citizens in the various new networks intended to increase the density of information flows and services across the continent.⁴⁶

To the extent to which nations or political entities such as the European Union are constructed through the agreement of particular forms of technical standardization, these communities are not simply registered in but produced through these technological formats. Thus, to take one example, Manuel Castells⁴⁷ points to the specific consequences of the European Commission’s decision to implement a single technical standard for mobile phones within Europe (GSM: Global System for Mobile Communications). Clearly, this was one of the causes of the very high “teledensity” of the European Union, as compared to that of the United States, where incompatible technical standards “split” the market and led to a lower initial take-up of mobile telephony than in many other countries, as the lack of inter-network

compatibility made the overall benefits of the “cell-phone” less attractive to potential users in the United States.

Walls and Borders: Europe's Edges and Others

If the border of Europe today is as much a virtual as a physical phenomenon, policed by computers and GPS technology, we should nonetheless remember its prototype: the physical boundary around the Roman Empire. This was created by the forts built between the Rhine and the Danube and by Hadrian's Wall, running between the Irish Sea and the North Sea, which together sealed the empire's northern limits. In all of this Europe has always been defined by reference to its Others, whether the Germanic barbarians of the northeast, the “uncivilized” Celts, the “Asiatic hordes” of the Steppes, or the Ottomans and the Muslims. If the first reference to the idea of “Europe” appears in the eighth century at the point of Charles Martel's victory over the Islamic forces at Tours, Pope Pius III's explicit identification of Europe with Christendom in 1458, soon after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and the launching of the great imperial conquests in the New World and Africa, further consolidates this definition. These were, in effect, the historical origins of today's definition of Europe – and the European Union has, in recent years, been pressurized by traditional Catholic forces to more explicitly recognize the continent's “Christian roots.”⁴⁸

Today it seems as if, rather than entering the “end of history” as proposed by utopian market liberal commentators such as Fukayama following the end of the Cold War, what Europe has seen is rather more like the revenge of a set of very old histories.⁴⁹ As indicated earlier, we must always attend to the way in which old historical patterns are now often replayed in new technological guises. Thus, in her study of satellite and telephony systems in the Balkans, Lisa Parks notes that the wireless footprints being established there in the wake of the collapse of Yugoslavia as a nation effectively reinstate some very old political alliances as German and Austrian companies restructure and (virtually) “remap” in electronic form geographical territories that once belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁵⁰ Needless to say, these systems are clearly designed to prioritize the needs of tourism over those of local inhabitants.⁵¹

In this context Stanislav Mucha's film *Die Mitte*⁵² traces the odyssey undertaken in his filmic quest to visit the various towns all claiming to be “the center” of Europe: among them is the Western Ukrainian town of Rachid, which claims to have “officially” been the center of Europe since 1887. In a bizarre echo of Susan Hiller's “J-Street” photographic project, which documents the 300 streets with Jewish names that remain in Germany (though, of course, largely empty of Jewish people) Mucha's film introduces us to the last remaining

Hasidic Jew in the city. These projects show how Europe is constituted not only by that which is present within it but also by its significant absences – as registered in Hiller's project by the virtual presence (in the street names) of populations who have themselves been extruded. In a similar sense, Ulrike Ottinger's video trilogy *South-East Passage* (Germany 2002) documents what she describes as “the new blank spots of the European map” as she brings to visibility the traces of Europe's forgotten and excluded Others, which are still to be found in places like southern Poland, on the Black Sea, in Odessa and Istanbul.⁵³ In his own travels in this shadowy “Other Europe” Andrej Stasiuk travels to Voskopoje, now a backwater in rural Albania but once the largest city in the European part of the Ottoman Empire with a population of 30,000 households. It was the place where the caravan trials intersected *en route* from their trajectories across Poland, Hungary, Saxony, Constantia, Venice, and Constantinople. However, in yet another demonstration of the frequent correspondence and symbiosis of the virtual and actual modalities of communication, it was also, as he notes, the site of the first printing press in the Balkans, established 300 years ago.⁵⁴

Beyond Europe: Untold Stories from the “B-Zone”

In the wake of the economic crisis which has now bedeviled the eurozone for 10 years, and in the context of the various forms of anti-immigrant nationalism that have arisen among the disadvantaged and disenchanted sections of the European public, it is all too easy to see the severe limitations and contradictions entailed in the EU project. In its current form, the richer part of northwestern Europe has attempted to construct for itself an identity “purified” of the presence of the various others who might be seen to despoil the tranquil and self-confident image of its heritage as the presumed heartland of world “civilization.”⁵⁵ However, we must now look beyond Europe as we have known it towards that “other” territory which Verstraete refers to as “Europe Minor.” There we see a geography of displacement, located among the long-abandoned, backstage “B-Zone” of Europe's lost and banished histories (the Balkans, Turkey, the Caucasus) – of “things unseen and unintended, of collateral effects and unrecorded movements” away from “what happens on the international stage in front of the cameras or on the circuits of the touristic corridors.” Here, contrary to the conventional historical narrative of Europe, we find a “history which Europe has been at pains to forget – a patchwork of contradictory lines, chokepoints, modes of displacement and untranslatable stories.”⁵⁶ It is only in the light of this broader and more inclusive perspective that we shall be able to make sense of what “Europe” might mean in any viable future.

If, as noted above, the constitution of Europe can only be understood in the context of its relations to its significant external Others, and European history has long fallen in the shadow of the threat from the East, then the Balkans, covering the "intermediate" zone between Europe and Asia, repays close study.⁵⁷ The region can variously be understood to function contemporaneously as a space of expansion for the European Union, as an outlying *banlieu* of troublesome populations, and as a potential playground for its tourists.⁵⁸ It can also be considered as space of experimentation in which current European histories have been foreshadowed in curious sequences. As one of the Balkan interviewees in Angela Melitopoulos' "Corridor X" puts it, "somehow the Balkans were always the kind of test field. We had [a] collective president-ship system of rotation of the 'Chairs' [just] as it is now in use in the Presidency of the European Community ... The idea of 'locality' that is now in use in the European Union was [previously] the system [used in] Yugoslavia."⁵⁹

It is in this context that we can best understand the European Union's decision to put the construction of communications infrastructures and "corridors" reaching through the Balkans and the Middle East as far as China, at the center of its "expansion" policy. The strategy of construction of transport corridors such as these, which continue to be central to the European Union's plans, has its roots in Bismarck's dream, noted earlier, of a railway that would open up the Orient to German political ambitions. Indeed, the ghosts of history haunt many of these initiatives. The European Union's long-planned "Corridor 8" project, designed to provide a combination of road and rail, oil and gas pipeline, electricity and telecommunication networks, linking the Bulgarian Black Sea coast to the Albanian Adriatic, can readily be recognized as an attempt to recreate the European part of the Silk Road (*Via Egnatia*, as it was known) down which St. Peter travelled and which connected Rome to the Middle East in earlier times.⁶⁰ This route is of enormous historical significance, having been built as a military road for the Roman Empire and later serving to link the two halves of the Byzantine Empire, stretching, as it did, onwards from Salonika to Constantinople. Similarly the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline project, crucial to Western plans to control energy supplies from the Caucasus, has recently been redescribed as part of a "Super Silk Highway" planned ultimately to provide an integrated transport system linking Europe with Central Asia across the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Caspian.⁶¹ Thus we see that the project of the single market was in its inception (and is still) centrally founded on the prospect of creating efficient communications and transport links enabling an ideally seamless continuity between its constituent parts, most particularly, as Verstraete remarks, in the form of the "TENs" (Trans-European Networks) in "transport (road, water, air) energy (electricity, gas, oil) and telecommunications (e-sevices, e-learning, mobile communication)".⁶²

Europe's Troubled Prospects

On the basis of policies of this kind, in the early years of the twenty-first century there was a considerable degree of optimism about of Europe's future. This optimism was based, among other things, on the fact that the 500 million people living in the member states of the European Union constitute a more numerous political community than anywhere else in the world apart from China and India. The "economies of scale" for which its population size provided had indeed been the original rationale for the "Common Market" set up by its founders in the 1950s. The European Union's "expansion project" then rapidly extended its scale even further, with the accession of the countries of Eastern Europe previously enclosed within the Soviet sphere of influence and then those from the northern end of the Balkans. After the initially successful launch of the euro, the continent's potential power and bright future on the world stage was enthusiastically heralded by authors such as Mark Leonard.⁶³ As I write (August 2015) its prospects seem rather more dismal: it is perhaps rather more likely that sooner or later, we shall see the emergence of a "two-tier" Europe, in which the more affluent economies of Europe's north join together not only around a single (Deutschmark-based?) currency but also a fully coordinated set of fiscal policies. This would of course involve the final expulsion of some of the "backward" (inefficient, unproductive ...) territories of the south (Greece and Spain). Perhaps, in the Italian case, it would even involve the policy long advocated by the Northern League, of deconstructing the nation by consigning everything south of Rome to its own, separated fate. That kind of strategy would involve reinventing a territory not so different from that of the Hanseatic League, which joined the affluent cities of northern Europe and Scandinavia in a previous era – all of which would seem to indicate an emerging inclination towards a rather more "defensive," limited, and exclusive vision of what Europe is to be in the next century.⁶⁴

Notes

- 1 D. Chakrabarty (2001) Europe as a Problem of Indian History, *Traces* 1, 159–182; B. Larkin (2008) *Signal and Noise Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, Duke University Press; F. Braudel (1995) *A History of Civilisations*, Penguin.
- 2 G. Murdock and M. Pickering (2009) The Birth of Distance, in M. Bailey (ed.), *Narrating Media History*, Routledge, pp. 9, 1.
- 3 D.R. Winseck and R.M. Pike (2007) *Communication and Empire*, Duke University Press. See also my later discussion in Chapter 5 of the work of Alan Blum on this point – A. Blum (2012) *Tubes: Behind the Scenes at the Internet*, Viking.

- 4 T. Standage (1998) *The Victorian Internet*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- 5 Winseck and Pike, *Communication and Empire*, 31, 9–10, 28, 30.
- 6 A. Mattelart (1996) *The Invention of Communication*, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 169, 205; A. Mattelart (2000) *Networking the World*, University of Minnesota Press, p. 14; F. Ratzel (1988) *Geographie Politique*, Editions Européennes, quoted in Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, p. 212.
- 7 Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*.
- 8 For example, the grand Midi canal, built in the seventeenth century with the strategic aim of enabling the French navy to move its fleet from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean while bypassing the British stronghold at Gibraltar.
- 9 Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, pp. 6; 11. Cf. French twentieth-century “TGV” trains as a comparable “Grand Projet” of the contemporary French State.
- 10 W. Schivelbusch (1977) *The Railway Journey*, University of California Press, pp. 197, 195, 194.
- 11 Mattelart, *Networking the World*, p. 4.
- 12 Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, p. 43 and Mattelart, *Networking the World*, p. 5.
- 13 Pierre Larousse and Jules Michelet quoted in C. Wolmar (2010) *Blood, Iron and Gold: How the Railways Transformed the World*, Atlantic Books, p. 23.
- 14 Goethe quoted in C. Wolmar (2010) *Blood, Iron and Gold: How the Railways Transformed the World*, Atlantic Books, pp. 25, 32; Constantine Pecquer (1839) quoted in Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, p. 70.
- 15 Cf. Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, pp. 106, 146. For a contemporary commentary see also Ivaylo Ditchev’s comments on class divisions in Balkan trains in Chapter 4.
- 16 H. Mackinder (1904) The Geographical Pivot of History, *The Geographical Journal* 23 (4), 434, 423, 428. On Europe’s long-threatened eastern border and the crucial role of the Hapsburg dynasty in defending Christian Europe against the Ottomans see S. Winder (2013) *Danubia*, Picador.
- 17 This was shortly after President Mitterand had defined a European as “someone who watches American soap opera on a Japanese TV.”
- 18 Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, p. 89.
- 19 Quoted in I. Salovaara-Moring (2006) Fortress Europe, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom, p. 114.
- 20 G. Verstraete (2010) *Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora and the Politics of Location*, Duke University Press, p. 8.
- 21 Verstraete, *Tracking Europe*, pp. 4; 10; 88; Greg Richards quoted in Verstraete, *Tracking Europe*, p. 61.
- 22 See M. Georgiou and C. Sandvoss (eds.) (2008) *Popular Culture* 6 (3) special issue on Eurovisions: Identity and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest.
- 23 C. Green (2014) Forget Dating Sites, Erasmus is the Place to Find True Love, *The Independent* (September 24); T. Garton Ash, Let a New Generation Speak Up for Europe, *The Guardian* (December 8).

24 Verstraete, *Tracking Europe*, pp. 90, 93.

25 Cf. T. Cresswell (2006) *On the Move*, Routledge, p. 237.

26 Cf. Verstraete, *Tracking Europe*.

27 G. Verstrate (2009) Timescapes, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 (2), 157–172.

28 As an earlier French commentator put it, speaking of the new train system of the 1840s: “the railways only serve the points of departure, the waystations and the terminals, which are mostly at great distances from each other. They are of no use whatsoever for the intervening spaces, which they traverse with disdain and provide only with a useless spectacle” – of the speeding train going by Charles Dunoyer, quoted in Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, p. 38.

29 Cf. the debate about the contradictory consequences, in this same respect, of the proposed “HS2” Hi-Speed rail link in the United Kingdom. See also my discussion in Chapter 8 of the sense of North African migrants that Europe is “pulling” Spain further to the north, and thus out of their reach.

30 A. Hoete (ed.) (2003) *ROAM: A Reader on the Aesthetics of Mobility*, Black Dog Publishing.

31 N. Barley People, in Hoete, *ROAM*, p. 188.

32 C. Charlton and T. Vowles (2008) Inter-urban and Regional Transport, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell.

33 C. Wolmar (2010) *Blood, Iron and Gold: How the Railways Transformed the World*, Atlantic Books, pp. 303, 38.

34 Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 232–237.

35 Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 233–234.

36 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 237.

37 As Bruno Latour famously claimed, even the biggest network is ultimately made of lots of small, fragile links.

38 D. Crouch (2015) Danish Land Grab Would Turn Part of Sweden into Greater Copenhagen, *The Guardian* (March 3).

39 T. Andric (1995) *The Bridge Over the Drina*, Harvill Press. (Originally published in Serbo-Croat in 1945.)

40 The Turkish filmmaker Tuncel Kurtiz produced a remarkable film, *E5 – Die Gastarbeiterstrasse*, documenting, in vivid detail, the material labor of the epic migrant journeys made in overburdened, unreliable old cars on the motorway T. Kurtiz (1978) *E5 – Die Gastarbeiterstrasse*, Swedish Television and Radio Corporation.

41 A. Melitopoulos (2005) Corridor X, in A. Franke (ed.), *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond*, Kunst Werke Berlin/Actar Publishing.

42 N. Vilić quoted in Verstraete, *Tracking Europe*, p. 150.

43 A. Barry (2001) *Political Machines: Governing a Technological Society*, Athlone Press.

44 Barry, *Political Machines*, pp. 19, 38, 13, 64.

45 Barry, *Political Machines*, pp. 26, 67, 20.

46 Barry, *Political Machines*, pp. 70–71, 91.

47 M. Castells, M. Fernandez-Ardevol, J.L. Qiu, and A. Sey (2007) *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*, MIT Press.

48 S. Hall (2007) In, But Not Of, Europe, *Soundings* 22; I. Black (2004) Christianity Bedevils Talks on EU Treaty, *The Guardian* (March 22); R. McKie (2005) Europe's Answer to the Great Wall of China, *The Observer* (March 20).

49 F. Fukuyama (1992) *The End of History*, Penguin.

50 L. Parks (2005) Postwar Footprints: Satellite and Wireless Stories in Slovenia and Croatia, in A. Franke (ed.), *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond*, Kunst Werke Berlin/Actar Publishing, pp. 306–347.

51 In a similar vein, Petrella notes the reemergence of models of transnational/ regional economic and political organization curiously similar to that of the network of Hanseatic League ports that controlled northern European trade in the Middle Ages. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that we are entering a “new Hanseatic phase of the world economy” based on “global techno-apartheid.” Petrella, quoted in Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, p. 305; cf. also debates in the early part of the twenty-first century about the possibility of the eurozone being redefined to more clearly bring together only the richer economies of northern Europe to the exclusion of those in the south.

52 S. Mucha (2003) *The Centre [Die Mitte]* Arte/Ventura Films, Germany.

53 S. Hiller (2005) *The J-Street Project*, DAAD; U. Ottinger (2002) *South-East Passage*, Ulrike Ottinger Filmproduction, Berlin.

54 A. Stasiuk (2012) *On the Road to Babadag: Travels in the Other Europe*, Vintage Books, p. 101.

55 Cf. K. Clarke (1969), *Civilisation*, British Broadcasting Corporation.

56 A. Franke (2005) Introduction, in *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond*, Kunst Werke Berlin/Actar Publishing, pp. 6–7; Verstraete, *Tracking Europe*, p. 145.

57 Mackinder, Geographical Pivot; D. Morley and K. Robins (1995) *Spaces of Identity*, Routledge; Winder, *Danubia*.

58 Cf. the recent rise of Croatia as a fashionable holiday destination for affluent Europeans.

59 N. Vilic, quoted in Verstraete, *Tracking Europe*, p. 151.

60 B. Despedov (2005) Corridor 8: Travel Notes by a Balkan Film-maker, in A. Franke (ed.), *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond*, Kunst Werke Berlin/Actar Publishing, p. 283. Trade routes have long histories, which often have an origin in the natural boundaries established by physical geography. While such factors are more readily overcome with modern technologies, they remain more consequential than is often recognized. Thus, negotiations in 2010 between the Indian and Chinese governments to open a direct trade link between their countries by reopening the Nathu La Pass in the Himalayas, enabling goods to be more easily traded between western China and the port of Calcutta, can only be understood in the context of the longer history of the articulation of the overland trade route through Samarkand with the Arab sea routes through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

61 U. Biemann (2010) Suspended in the Post-Humanist Lapse: Contained Mobility, in *Mission Reports: Artistic Practices in the Field/Video Works 1998–2008*, Bildmuseet: Umea University, pp. 55–61.

62 Verstraete, Timescapes, 159.

63 See his paeon to Europe's rosy future: M. Leonard (2005) *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century*, Harper Collins. See also T.R. Reid (2004) *The United States of Europe: The New Superpower*, Penguin; J. Rifkin (2004) *The European Dream*, Penguin; T. Garton Ash (2004) *Free World: America, Europe and the Surprising Future of the West*, Random House; A. Giddens (2014) *Turbulent and Mighty Continent*, Polity.

64 Clearly, anything I say here constitutes a dangerous hostage to fortune, but this outcome is perhaps not so fanciful as it seems. Consider, for example, the close correspondence between the Hanseatic territories and those of the governments that pushed hardest for Greece's expulsion from the eurozone during the financial crisis of 2015 and who took the most draconian view of the various "failings" of their lazy and impecunious/irresponsible southern European neighbors.

Part II

Reconceptualizing Communications: Mobilities and Geographies

3

Sedentarism, Nomadology, and “New Mobilities”

Introduction

Here, and in the following chapters in Part Two, the discussion moves to a more philosophical/ethical plane as I offer some further theoretical considerations with which to frame the discussion of the case studies of the different forms of mobility which I will analyze in Part Three of the book.

Community, Place, and Mobility: Sedentarian Metaphysics

Contemporary debates about mobility are often constructed around an opposition between the sedentarian and nomadic metaphysics of travel. The former, focused on traditional, conservative, definitions of authentically “rooted” culture, validates the authenticity of place and the “charms of residence” while seeing all movement as a source of inauthenticity, if not alienation. The metaphysics of sedentarianism thus treats mobility as socially dysfunctional or pathological, an inherent threat to the spatial ordering of the world.¹

Community itself has traditionally been understood as arising in and being sustained in and through everyday, face-to-face proximities, within localities of continuous copresence; voluntary mobility was the preserve of the rich and involuntary mobility was the fate of the vagabond or outcast. In this cosmology, physical contiguity and the strength of social and emotional connections have largely been assumed to be equivalent, so that all that is physically close at hand also feels familiar. Conversely, geographical distance has been equated with cultural difference, so that the world of the physically far away is presumed also to be the world of the unfamiliar.² By the same token, all forms of mobility, which “disembed” individuals from their local communities, have been seen to undermine social cohesion, and

as Tim Cresswell notes, mobility has long been associated with “pollution, destruction, disaster and danger, destabilisation.”³

The traditions of humanistic geography share this sedentarian idealization of place as crucial to the preservation of properly “rooted,” moral, and authentic forms of life. In that perspective, the concept of place itself acquires a positive moral virtue, while mobility is stigmatized ontologically, epistemologically, and normatively. In this sense, it is worth noting that, despite their political differences, early cultural studies writers such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart share a sedentarian orientation with conservative theorists of culture such as Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot.⁴ For all of them, culture depends on stability, rootedness, and continuity, while community is construed as centered on the personal, the concrete, and the local, as constituted in closely knit, family-based neighborhoods, and the most significant cultural threats are seen to derive from the influence of “foreign” influences.

These “sedentarian” approaches in social theory, as O.B. Jensen observes, can also be found in the Chicago School’s influential analysis of urban modernity as a process of transition from a place-based community of subjective feeling to a realm of (alienated) placelessness. For them “all forms of association among human beings rest finally upon locality” and “the mobility of city life, with its increase in the number and intensity of stimulations, tends inevitably to confuse and demoralise the person” so that, for example, the hobo is “not only a homeless man but a man without a cause.”⁵ The modern city has been characterized by flux and instability, and, for sociologists from Simmel to the Chicago School, it has been seen as giving rise to problematic anxieties and the potential disintegration of social bonds. The city is, then, a space of pathological mobility, a disordered “zone of deterioration ... [involving] ... demoralization, promiscuity and vice.”⁶ This perspective still finds expression today in the work of writers such as Robert Putnam, who sees sprawl and mobility as the main eroding forces of community leading to a destabilizing sense of isolation in contemporary urban life, while Richard Sennett likewise presumes that mobility destroys identity and leads to a disembodiment from the real or the authentic.⁷ From this point of view, the central issue concerns the loss of the (place-based) sociality of the Good Old Days. This perspective is founded on the belief that “the types of bridging ties that connect us to community and neighbourhood have withered” and beyond family/spouse/partner, for many, there is only, as Sennett dismissively phrases it, the realm of “easy Internet familiarity.”⁸

However, in contrast to any perspective which equates community with place, Jensen argues that we need to recognize that identities, cultures, and communities do not solely reside within the confinement of bounded places or static enclaves (the home, locality, or nation) but are also found in the intermediary places, or “armatures” through which people circulate between places. Insofar as travel is not just about getting from point A to point B, mobility

practices are themselves involved also in the construction of meaning and identity and, in this process, as he claims, streets can be as important as squares. Indeed, this argument presses towards the possibility of understanding that the “agora” itself is not necessarily static and fixed (thus, for example, a train conversation might be understood as part of a “mobile agora”). It is in this context that, just as Walter Benjamin spoke of the arcade as “the dwelling place of the collective … the furnished and familiar interior of the masses,” Jane Jacobs saw the street as a crucial site of social interaction, rather than simply as a space of circulation. Here we might also think of the work of Rem Koolhaas *et al.* on the ways in which in the contemporary Third World city the highway often becomes not simply a traffic route but also a multifunctional site for a variety of social interactions and business opportunities, from beggars and flower sellers at the traffic lights, to fully fledged roadside markets.⁹

Nomadology: Frictionless Flux?

The mirror image of the sanctification of place exhibited in the conservative tradition is offered, within some contemporary commentary, by an idealization of all that is nomadic. There, mobility is identified with practices of transgression and resistance – a perspective that often provides the foundation for theoretical discourses of antiessentialism and antifoundationalism. In this respect, one could think of Michel de Certeau’s celebration of mobile practices of resistance to structures of power and spatial control (especially as popularized in the work of John Fiske) or Mikhail Bakhtin’s focus on how the momentary and fluid forms of the carnivalesque perpetually oppose the fixed and monumental forms of “official” culture.¹⁰ This identification of unfettered movement with the liberty of the modern individual perhaps begins with Thomas Hobbes, who argued that such mobility was an absolute right. In much contemporary commentary, anything fluid or dynamic tends to be identified with the progressive, the exciting, and the contemporary, while things that are static or bounded are assumed to be both dull and reactionary and are characteristically associated with the past.¹¹ This “nomadic metaphysics” is most visible in the scholarship influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, where power structures of domination are equated with fixity and mobility is attributed with the emancipatory powers of transgression.¹²

This focus on the nomad and/or the rhizomatic as evading the repressive control of the state certainly functions as a valuable critique of the “sedentary logic” of state, science, and civilization.¹³ Nonetheless, Caren Kaplan has noted its tendency to “romanticise mobility as a free-floating alternative to the rooted traditions of place.”¹⁴ Thus, nomadology often tends towards a romantic idealization of all forms of “cosmopolitan” mobility as *ipso facto* “liberating” or progressive. Among other failings, it does not recognize that the mobility of some

(whether defined in terms of class, race, or gender) often depends on the immobilization of others.¹⁵ As has been widely observed, not everybody has the same access to mobility, and even when people are “on the road,” not everybody is the master of his or her movement. Therefore the question is not simply about who travels, but also when and how and under what circumstances.¹⁶ As Arjun Appadurai cautions, speaking of the Third World, the romanticization of this circulatory, flow-based imagery is problematic not least because “if you take the point of view of the urban poor, for them, security of tenure – even if only in relation to a tiny plot of land – is absolutely central to their survival.”¹⁷

Beyond the Sedentarian/Nomadic Binary

These issues of the changing forms and rates of mobility clearly also raise questions of periodization. In recent years, theorists such as Harvey, Jameson, Giddens, and Bauman have all stressed the sociocultural effects of increasing speed and mobility and the role of technologies of time–space compression in undermining, destabilizing, and disembedding established social structures.¹⁸ From this perspective, space and geography are seen as no longer setting limits to social action. The key characteristic of this phase of “second” (or reflexive) modernity is argued to be the “liquefaction” of society, whereby the various flows now crisscrossing the globe dissolve previously solid structures into fleeting and transitory forms. This high-speed circulation is said to bring about “the progressive weakening of the social structure and its categories in favour of a world organised around mobility.”¹⁹

However, empirically speaking, the claims of a “global” increase in geographical mobility on which this argument rests are highly controversial. Even today, the majority of the population, in many countries, stays relatively immobile within its locality. Thus more than 50 percent of adults in the United Kingdom still live within five miles of where they were born and 75 percent of British grandparents claim to see their grandchildren at least once a week, which betokens a low rate of mobility both within and between generations. Nor is this sedentarism some exclusively British trait: as Appadurai argues, in the United States, notwithstanding the ideologies of mobility with which the “land of promise” is historically associated, its poorer members rarely go anywhere much, and certainly not “abroad,” except for those of their children who go to fight foreign wars.²⁰ Indeed, a tracking study of 200 North American mobile phone users conducted by Northeastern University’s Boston Research Center discovered that over a six-month period, on average, 75 percent of those monitored stayed mainly within a 20-mile circle, and 50 percent kept to a circle little more than six miles wide, while only a small minority (15 percent) averaged more than 40 miles. As the project’s director put it, “despite the fact that we think of ourselves as spontaneous and unpredictable, we do have our patterns

that we move along, and for the vast majority of people, it's a short distance.”²¹ Moreover, while the average distances covered per person/day have increased, the number of journeys and the amount of journey time per person/day has remained stable.

If the problem with the sedentarist metanarrative is its politically conservative tendency to pathologize all forms of mobility, the corresponding problem with the “nomadic” perspective is that it tends to deal in historically ungrounded generalizations that flatten and obscure all the important differences between the modalities of mobility available to members of particular sociocultural groups in specific places. To this extent, we may perhaps be better served by a model that distinguishes between various modes of mobility and the particular conditions which produce them. As John Postill has observed, while the recent period has seen a marked preference towards metaphors of fluidity and mobility, rather than boundedness and fixity, “bald statements such as ‘identity is always fluid and situated’ are actually no more helpful than the opposite – and equally absurd – claim that ‘identity is always fixed and non-situated.’”²²

Migrancy as Metaphor

In this connection Sara Ahmed has argued that the trouble with theories of migrancy and mobility of the type developed by theorists such as Iain Chambers and Rosie Braidotti can be identified as a problem of “metaphorization.” Here we necessarily return to the vexed question, initially raised in Chapter 1, of the role of the metaphor in social theory. Sometimes, in these theories, the figures of the migrant, the nomad, the exile – and radical cultural theorists themselves – are conflated, so as to create a notion that “we” are all migrants who have in common a subversive transcendence of the stifling boundaries of “home,” as we all (transgressively) break borders, whether of a geographical or conceptual kind. The problem here, as Ahmed explains, is that this generalization of mobility as a form of ontological liberation from reified identities is proposed as a kind of “ethics of transgression” that improperly universalizes all forms of estrangement. Evidently, in so doing, it erases all the important specificities and differences between those who travel, disregarding the diversity in the extent of their travel, the way they do so and why, and whether or not they have control over their mobility.²³ As Ahmed points out, Braidotti’s work “translates the literal into the metaphoric … such that nomads come to perform a particular kind of theoretical work, representing something other than themselves. The specificity and difference of particular nomadic peoples is hence alluded to as an inspiration but then erased.” Ultimately, as she argues, the problem is that, despite the superficial appeal of the analogy “real nomads” and “nomadic thought” are not in fact equivalent to each other, and their conceptual conflation only obscures our understanding of either phenomenon.²⁴

As Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry argue, we need to problematize "both sedentarist approaches in the social sciences that treat place, stability, and dwelling as a natural steady-state, and deterritorialized approaches that posit a new 'grand narrative' of mobility, fluidity or liquidity as a pervasive condition of postmodernity or globalisation." The issues here concern "how to move and how to settle, what is up for grabs, what is locked in, who is able to move and who is trapped."²⁵ In this context it may well be that, as Cresswell puts it, "sedentarism and nomadism are better understood as 'metanarratives that inform more specific, more local, more contextual attitudes to mobility' and always have to be understood as operating within a particular system of power relations."²⁶ Thus, just as Doreen Massey has argued for an "ex-centric" model of place, Amin and Thrift propose that places "are best thought of not so much as enduring sites, but as 'moments' of encounter" and Jensen sees "place as constituted by flow within a relational geography" which recognizes that "our lives are not just what happens in static enclaves, but also in all the intermediaries and circulation in between places." Rather than counterposing sedentarist and nomadological perspectives in an unproductive binary opposition, we should perhaps think in terms of the analysis of practices of "dwelling in motion"²⁷ in which culture and community is produced in both its actual and virtual dimensions. In contrast to the celebrations of nomadism which tend to assume an almost effortless and frictionless flux of movement, we need to understand more precisely *how* people move, and what is involved in the multiple materialities and different types of migration.²⁸ Here might perhaps do well to follow Carl Miller's proposal for a "less utopian, less arrogant and less messianistic theorisation of movement, a positive cosmopolitanism that [none-theless - DM] remains meticulously aware of both localities and differences."²⁹

"New Mobilities" Theory

Recent years have seen the emergence of the "new mobilities" paradigm, associated with the work of sociologists like John Urry, geographers such as Tim Cresswell, and cultural theorists such as Caren Kaplan.³⁰ In this connection, Hannam *et al.* insist that "contemporary space is a complex and tangled mosaic of superimposed and interpenetrating vectors and networks of connection, at different levels, in which we must recognize complex intersections and different regimes of flow, which move at different speeds across different scales."³¹ Similarly, Urry argues elsewhere that, as travelling is increasingly constitutive of the structures of contemporary social life, a sociology of mobility is needed which distinguishes between corporeal, imaginative, and virtual travels.³² This approach also attempts to illuminate the disjunctions and intersections between different forms of mobility, such as the movement of objects, the imaginative forms of travel involved in watching television, or participation in virtual community via the Internet.³³

At its most abstract, Urry has defined what he calls the “mobility turn” in social science as a way to “connect the analysis of different forms of travel, transport and communications with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organised through time and across various spaces.” He recognizes that mobility is not a new phenomenon, but he argues that its contemporary scale, diversity, and increasing interconnectivity (along virtual and material dimensions) is what distinguishes what he calls the “mobility complex” of our age.³⁴ His approach follows from the rejection of the conventional sociological premise that a society can effectively be understood as a community operating within the framework of a nation-state, whose population enjoys the rights and duties of citizenship by virtue of their sedentary occupation of a given territory. Against these presumptions, Urry argues that we must analyze the ways in which various global networks and flows now undermine endogenous social structures, insofar as contemporary societies are organized around the movement of people, ideas, information, and objects rather than as a static set of relations, structures, and institutions.³⁵ What is needed, he claims, is an analysis of the interdependence of the diverse mobilities of peoples, objects, commodities, money, images, information, and wastes – and their heterogeneous, uneven, synergies and disjunctures – and their often unpredictable consequences.³⁶

As John Shaw *et al.* argue, if “the very ordinariness of transport systems often means that they are taken for granted,” nonetheless, transport networks themselves have profound effects in “sculpt[ing] landscapes of differential accessibility and ... value” by making particular places more or less accessible to different categories of people.³⁷

Here we must also recognize the necessity to transcend the dichotomy between transport research and social research by “putting social relations into transport and connecting different forms of transport with complex patterns of social experience conducted through communications-at-a-distance.”³⁸ In the past, the approach of transport studies has been largely “asocial,” treating it as a neutral set of functional technologies, and its analytic concerns largely limited to those of volume, efficiency and speed. Unfortunately, this “asocial” model of transport has often been complemented by an “a-mobile” form of social science that, as indicated in my earlier discussion of sedentarian models, has tended to see societies as homogenous, self-enclosed, contiguous blocks of territory, each neatly “containing” a single culture under the sole control of its own nation-state; and cultures, societies, and territories were assumed to coincide in an isomorphic model. This tradition, which Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy describe as based on the principle of “methodological nationalism,” thus retains the image of the nation whose state functions as a kind of “container” for social life.³⁹ However, there are good grounds for arguing that these presumptions are based on an outmoded ontology: after all, as Doreen Massey points out,

in origin, it is simply the particular way of imagining societies that has been dominant in Europe since the Treaty of Westphalia codified the system of interstate relations in 1648.⁴⁰

Mobility Systems and the History of Time–Space Compression

The “new mobilities” paradigm is premised on the idea that “different societies are characterised by the domination of one or other mobility system” – the principal ones being identified as the pedestrian system, the horse-drawn system, the steam/railway system, the automobility system, and the aeromobility system. Mobility systems involve “different modes of circulation and different forms of mobility capital” and distribute people, activities, and objects and information in and through time–space at various spatial ranges and speeds along structured routes (e.g., footpaths, pavements, cycle tracks, railways, telephone lines, roads, boulevards, computer networks, or airports). These systems can be stable for relatively long periods of time, and the “strong” version of this argument would claim that during such periods, people are, to some extent, “locked into” the particular pathways which the system lays down.⁴¹

From this perspective, the development of the railway system, for example, is to be understood as not simply an isolated innovation in transport technology but part of a general nineteenth-century remodeling of the social world based on the acceleration of the process of circulation – of people, especially in the city, but also of commodities and information – and as being “one of the great engines of social improvement” along with “uniform postage and the electric Telegraph.”⁴²

Thus the birth of the modern industrial system in nineteenth-century Europe gave rise to powerful machine systems that created new possibilities and potentially transformed cultural sensibilities.⁴³ In the United Kingdom, the telegram, the national postal system, the railway timetable, and the scheduled ocean steamship service were all brought into use between 1839 and 1843. These technologies made it possible for people, on a mass scale to “do things and go places … unimaginable within earlier epochs,” transforming the economics of cost and distance.⁴⁴ Thus, if, in the early years of the nineteenth century, as Tim Cresswell argues, the limits of mobility were given by “the speed of a horse, or water in a river, or wind in the sails,” by the beginning of the twentieth century, “large portions of the world were connected by the iron web of rail [and] steamships crossed the Atlantic on regular schedules.”⁴⁵ The railway in particular was seen as a “sign of modernity” and the locomotive as a symbol of progress and utopia, demonstrating the new centrality of speed as a principle of public life.⁴⁶

However, these new communication technologies not only empowered their users to journey further afield than ever before, they also produced new modes of subjective experience that, some commentators felt, effectively dehumanized the traveler. They argued that when the railway traveler is integrated into this system, he or she is, in effect, depersonalized insofar as “for the duration of such transportation, one ceases to be a person and becomes an object, a piece of freight.”⁴⁷ As John Ruskin famously put it, the railway “transmutes a man from a traveller into a living parcel”⁴⁸ and individuals take commodity form as human parcels who “dispatch themselves to their destination by means of the railway.”⁴⁹ In this respect, rail travel “was experienced as a form of participation in an industrial process” that domesticated previously arduous journeys within new structures of timetabled predictability, mechanical uniformity, and calculation,⁵⁰ and these new technologies thus also played a significant part in producing new types of self-consciously “mobile” subjects.⁵¹

Within Britain, significant improvements in the road network had already begun to reduce travel time dramatically by the early nineteenth century, and by 1860, the new rail network meant that the whole of the Britain was within 10 hours travel time of the capital.⁵² The coming of the railway system, in particular, supplied a new sense of systematic and mechanized connectedness between all the points in what was then a new network of possible destinations and modes of circulation of people, goods, and services. Crucial here was a new sense of orderliness: the “objective clock time” of the “modernist railway timetable” ushered in a new sense of punctuality as part of a “powerful system of governmentality” – with the effect of scheduling the whole of national life.⁵³

From the Railway System to Car System

If the railway system ushered in an era of unforeseen speed, the car system supplanted the concept of speed with that of convenience – providing car drivers with a way of developing their own personalized and more flexible scheduling of social life beyond the rigidities of the railway’s necessarily fixed, public timetable. Thus, automobility reorganized time and space in a quite different way, desynchronizing time–space paths and allowing flexible timetabling of travel according to personalized, subjective temporalities. Urry defines the “car system” as also involving “licensing authorities, traffic police, petrol refining and distribution, road building and maintenance, hotels, roadside service areas and motels, etc.”⁵⁴ As he notes, this petrol-based car system is much more than simply a practical mode of transport and that it came to represent the “good life” for the mobile citizen of the twentieth century – as “a marker of citizenship and the basis of sociability and networking.”⁵⁵

To jump forward in time, in pursuit of this theme of the shift to more “individualized” timetabling, nowadays it is the mobile phone that further

extends this tendency. If the shift from the railway system to the car system was one from a rigid system of public efficiencies and punctuality to a more flexible and individualized mode of activity, the mobile phone further undermines the rigid system of clock-based synchronization. As we shall see later, in our discussion of the mobile phone in Chapter 7, this involves a more fluid set of constantly adjusted individual times, in which these personalized technologies allow communication to occur within a system of “networked individualism.”⁵⁶

If conventional histories tend to provide a history of “speed-up” understood simply as the “incidental” consequences of transformative technologies, John Tomlinson argues that “speed” has always been central to the narratives of modernity and its characteristic sensibility.⁵⁷ His periodization distinguishes between the increases in mechanical speed associated with what Zygmunt Bauman⁵⁸ would call the era of “heavy modernity” (characterized by the triumph of engineering over distance, in which “size is power,” “volume is success,” and wealth and power are concentrated in relatively fixed physical locations) and the contemporary forms of mobile, liquid, and fluid culture. He phrases this distinction as involving “a shift … from an effortful speed to an effortless mediated delivery,”⁵⁹ and in constructing this periodization, Tomlinson draws, if critically, on Paul Virilio’s “dromology.” He identifies the contemporary sensibility as based on the cultural principles of fluidity and “immediacy” characteristic of the increasingly tele-mediated experiential forms of everyday experience that have become naturalized within the life world of “liquid modernity” and argues that this structure of feeling is central to the ontology of contemporary life.

Questions of Periodization and Determination

Self-evidently, any model of successive mobility systems depends on a schema of clearly defined technological “epochs” succeeding each other sequentially. If we are to avoid such “epochist” tendencies (which tend to assume that “everything changes” when a new technology is invented) we must recognize, with Bruno Latour, the extent to which we always live in a hybrid world of “mixtures.” In reality, technologies and practices from different periods coexist in many different symbiotic forms, in a variety of complexly differentiated “techno-zones.”⁶⁰ Thus, today, in particular, we must avoid any overdrawn binary divides between the eras of the “old” and “new” media. Rather than assuming that “we” have proceeded abruptly from one era of communications to another, we also need to investigate the continuities, overlaps, and modes of symbiosis between old and new technologies of symbolic and material communications and the extent to which material geographies retain significance, even under changing technological conditions.

Every new media technology “reorganises ideas of hereness and nearness,” and as Orvar Lofgren observes, it would be possible to write a “history of the birth and death of various multi-tasking media competences” and of the “periods of naturalisation in between” that tend to make them, retrospectively, invisible – by virtue of their having become taken-for-granted over time. Thus, in the early stages, the new media of any age are often experienced as “annihilating distances or speeding up information exchanges in ways that produce ... stress” prior to their becoming naturalized and banal backdrops within the taken-for-granted practices of everyday life.⁶¹ As he notes, over time, new media can turn older ones into merely nostalgic hangovers or, on occasion, create novel hierarchies of authenticity that give a newly elevated status to old media. In the United Kingdom in recent years, vinyl records have gone through exactly this trajectory, moving from being considered merely an obsolete curio to being the epitome of urban cool among young music fans. Media that were at one time considered to be “essentially” stationary – such as, in its origins, reading and at a later stage, radio listening – can become mobile. Thus, via the importation of the radio and music player into the automobile, “the fast lane of the freeway ... is transformed into a space for meditation and daydreaming.”⁶² The combination of particular modes of transport and communications media can themselves create synergies that produce new modalities of experience and media genres, such as “travel reading” or “in-flight movies,” which themselves rapidly acquire a conventionalized status.

Historical Perspectives: How New is Mobility?

Ever since Frederic Jameson, David Harvey, and Ed Soja alerted us to the centrality of “time–space compression” in the constitution of (post)modernity there has been a significant resurgence in cultural geography.⁶³ Nonetheless, their work is now subject to critique by those who rightly point to the much longer history of the “compression” process, well before any “postmodern” era.⁶⁴ Thus, rather than imagining that debates about time–space compression are particular to our own times, we should note the words of one commentator writing in 1839 who observed that “we have seen the power of steam suddenly dry up the great Atlantic Ocean to less than half its breadth ... the Indian Ocean is ... infinitely smaller than it used to be ... the Mediterranean ... has before our eyes, shrunk into a lake.” In similar way, the railways were seen as producing a condensed geography based on new conditions of speed, to the point where the surface of the country seemed to shrivel in size until it “became not much larger than one immense city.”⁶⁵ As scholars such as Carolyn Marvin, Vinnie Mosco, and David Edgerton have noted, “newness” has to be understood as a historical constant,⁶⁶ not least because succeeding ages “keep repeating the claim that suddenly everything is new ... [with] ... the same list of novelties.

[But] what we are now saying about electronics is exactly what we said about traffic at the end of the nineteenth century ... the argument about the 'alienating pressure of modernity' is now officially an antique.⁶⁷

All of these visions of speed and mobility have a very long history. Thus, as Richard John argues, "long before the electric telegraph was credited with having annihilated time and space" the postal system had been described as reducing distance "almost to contiguity ... [so that] ... the ink is scarcely dry, or the wax cold on the paper, before we find in our hands, even at a distance of hundreds of miles a transcript of our dearest friend's mind." Furthermore, as early as the turn of the nineteenth century futurologists already envisaged that "the end of the twentieth century ... will probably see a generation to whom it will not be injurious to read a dozen square yards of newspapers daily, to be constantly called to the telephone, to be thinking simultaneously of the five continents of the world, to live half their time in a railway carriage or in a flying machine and ... [yet] ... know how to find its ease in the midst of a city inhabited by millions."⁶⁸ For an early twentieth-century vision of the rapidity of technological change and time–space compression we might consider that offered by the sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd in their studies of "Middletown" in the early 1920s United States, who already claimed, in that era, that

we today are probably living in one of the eras of greatest rapidity of change in the history of human institutions. New tools and techniques are being developed with stupendous celerity, while in the wake of these technical developments, increasingly frequent and strong culture waves sweep over us from without, drenching us with [the] material and non-material habits of other centers.⁶⁹

As we shall see later (Chapter 8) our era is often characterized as displaying unprecedented rates of migrancy as one of its distinctive features, and we are often told that we live in an increasingly mobile world. However, there is a question about just *how* "new" all this is. If we see matters in historical perspective, we find the Roman essayist Seneca noting as long ago as AD 50 that many of the empire's cities had large proportions of immigrants among their populations. Thus, he says, nowadays "whole nations have changed their abode ... nothing has stayed where it was born ... the human race is always on the move ... you will hardly find a single country inhabited by its original natives ... everywhere the people are of mixed and imported stock."⁷⁰

While it is true that the last 50 years have seen a considerable increase in mobility of people and goods around the world (even if that increase has been rather unevenly distributed), nonetheless, in relative terms, the increase in personal mobility in Europe in the period between 1800 and 1950 (in the period of the transition from the horse to the airplane) was far more profound than anything seen in recent years.⁷¹ Until the coming of the high-speed railways,

the speeds offered on trains, in fact, changed relatively little from the late nineteenth century – when, for instance, British travelers could already go from London to Brindisi in 48 hours, in order to then take the steamer for India through the Suez Canal.⁷² Indeed, the basic operating speeds of both cars and aircraft have been relatively stable for at least the last 50 years – and insofar as increases in overall transport speed have occurred in recent years, these are mainly attributable to increased efficiency of turnaround times at transport terminals.⁷³ In the same spirit, Steven Kern's analysis of the culture of time and space in the late nineteenth century shows that, in proportional terms, the increase in numbers and distances travelled by people then was far more radical a change than anything experienced more recently. In fact, the years between 1880 and the imposition of the US immigrant quotas in 1920 showed "the largest voluntary migration in human history crossed the Atlantic from Europe to the ports and factory towns of the eastern United States ... [while] ... others poured into the western ports from the Orient."⁷⁴

To talk of our age as being one of unparalleled mobility, or even nomadology, thus has very little historical foundation: as Goran Therborn observes, the transatlantic flow of migration is smaller now than it was at the end of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the First World War, 5 percent of the world's population were migrants while the International Office for Migration estimated only 2.5 percent in 2000.⁷⁵ Against this, Nicholas de Genova quotes a United Nations' study showing that the number of people residing outside their country of birth in 2002 was already then at an all-time high of 175 million – double the number a generation before. However, while clearly large in absolute terms and fast growing, these are still very small percentages in relation to world population.⁷⁶ As Doreen Massey argues, it will not really help us to understand our own era better if we set up some romanticized image of a settled and stable past in order to provide a "straw man" against which to contrast the supposedly new flux of postmodern globalization.⁷⁷

Notes

- 1 K. Hannam, M. Sheller, and J. Urry (2006) Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings, *Mobilities* 1 (1), 2–3, 12?; cf. T. Cresswell (2006) *On the Move*, Routledge, p. 27; L. Malkki (1997) National Geographic, in A. Gupta and J. Ferguson (eds.), *Culture, Power, Place*, Duke University Press.
- 2 Cf. Heidegger on a "world without distance" in M. Heidegger (1959) *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Yale University Press.
- 3 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 20.
- 4 Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 32–36.
- 5 Quoted in O.B. Jensen (2009) Flows of Meaning, Cultures of Movement, *Mobilities* 4 (1), 141.

- 6 From G. Simmel [1903] *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, in K.H. Wolff (ed.) (1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Free Press to the Chicago School – see R. Park and E. Burgess (1925) *The City*, University of Chicago Press. Park quoted in Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 37 n. 37.
- 7 R. Putnam and R. Sennet quoted in O.B. Jensen (2009) Flows of Meaning, Cultures of Movement, *Mobilities* 4 (1), 142.
- 8 K. MacDonald and M. Grieco (2007) Accessibility, Mobility and Connectivity, *Mobilities* 2 (1), 3, 4. On the relative "thinness" of virtual community, see K. Robins and F. Webster (1999) *Times of the Techno Culture*, Routledge.
- 9 O.B. Jensen (2009) Flows of Meaning, Cultures of Movement, *Mobilities* 4 (1), 154, 151, 145; R. Koolhaas, S. Boeri, S. Kwinter, *et al.* (2000) *Mutations*, ACTAR.
- 10 J. Fiske (1987) *Television Culture*, Methuen; M. Bakhtin (1984) *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana University Press; Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 44–50.
- 11 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 25.
- 12 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (1986) *Nomadology*, Semiotexte.
- 13 Cf. Foucault's reference to "the bureaucrat who keeps our papers in order" as the classical icon of the repressive sedentary state – M. Foucault [1972] p.17 – quoted in A. D'Andrea (2006) Neo-Nomadism, *Mobilities* 1 (1), 108.
- 14 Kaplan quoted in B. Frello (2008) Towards a Discursive Analytics of Movement, *Mobilities* 3 (1), 28.
- 15 Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, Editorial, 3.
- 16 Cf. J. Wolff (1992) On the Road Again, *Cultural Studies* 7 (2), 224–239; A. Brah (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Routledge.
- 17 A. Appadurai (2002) The Right to Participate in the Work of the Imagination, in J. Brouwer, A. Mulder, and L. Marz (eds.), *Transurbanism*, Nai Publishing, pp. 36–37.
- 18 See M. Craig and N. Thrift (eds.) (2000) *Thinking Space*, Routledge – especially their introduction, for the longer history of time–space compression.
- 19 J. Urry (2004) The Complex Spaces of Scandal, in J.O. Bærenholdt and K. Simonsen, (eds.), *Space Odysseys. Spatiality and Social Relations in the 21st Century*, Ashgate, quoted in M. Nowicka (2006) Mobility, Space and Social Situation in the Second Modernity and Beyond, *Mobilities* 1 (3), 413. See also U. Beck, A. Giddens, and S. Lash (1994) *Reflexive Modernisation*, Cambridge Polity Press.
- 20 A. Appadurai and D. Morley (2012) Decoding, Diaspora and Disjuncture, *New Formations* 73. As noted in that discussion, the sociology of relatively nonmobile populations remains important because even societies such as the United States are often less mobile than they seem.
- 21 A.-L. Barabasi, Northeastern University Center for Complex Network Research, Boston, quoted in *International Herald Tribune* (June 4, 2008).
- 22 J. Postill posted medianthro@easaonline.org (December 16, 2012).
- 23 S. Ahmed (1999) Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2 (3). I. Chambers (1994) *Migrancy*,

Culture and Identity, Routledge; R. Braidotti (1994) *Nomadic Subjects*, Columbia University Press.

24 Ahmed, Home and Away, 334–335.

25 Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, Editorial, 5, 8.; cf. also D. Massey (2005) *For Space*, Sage.

26 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 55 quoted in N. Mai and R. King (2009) Introduction to *Mobilities* 4 (3), 301.

27 A. Amin and N. Thrift (2002) *Cities*, Polity Press, p. 30; J. Urry (2007) *Mobilities*, Polity Press quoted in Jensen, Flows of Meaning, 147–149.

28 As Burrell notes, the detail of the “actual journeys made by migrants ... have been notably absent from many of the key works on migrant experience.” K. Burrell (2008) Materialising the Border: Spaces of Mobility and Material Culture in Migration from Post-Socialist Poland, *Mobilities* 3 (3), 355; cf. also P. Basu and S. Coleman (2008) Introduction: Migrant Worlds, *Material Cultures*, *Mobilities* 3 (3).

29 C. Miller (1993) The Post identitarian Predicament: On the Footnotes of a Thousand Plateaus, *Diacritics* 23, 33.

30 J. Urry (2002) Mobility and Proximity, *Sociology* 36 (2), 255–274; Urry, *Mobilities*; T. Cresswell (2004) *Place*, Blackwell; Cresswell, *On the Move*; C. Kaplan (2000) *Questions of Travel*, Duke University Press; P. Adey (2010) *Mobility*, Routledge.

31 Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, Editorial, 2–3 and *Mobilities*, Immobilities, and Moorings, *Mobilities* 1 (1), 12.

32 J. Urry quoted in B. Frello (2008) Towards a Discursive Analytics of Movement, *Mobilities* 3 (1), 28.

33 Cf. also J. Larsen, K.W. Axhausen, and J. Urry (2006) Geographies of Social Networks, *Mobilities* 1 (2), 263.

34 Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 6, 195.

35 J. Urry (2000) Mobile Sociology, *British Journal of Sociology* 5 (1).

36 Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 185, 194; see also A. Appadurai (1996) *Modernity at Large*, University of Minnesota Press.

37 J. Shaw, R. Knowles, and I. Docherty (2008) Introducing Transport Geographies, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies*, Wiley Blackwell, p. 3.

38 M. Sheller and J. Urry quoted in K. MacDonald and M. Grieco (2007) Accessibility, Mobility and Connectivity, 3.

39 K. Robins and A. Aksoy (2003) The Enlargement of Meaning, *International Journal of Communication Studies* 65 (4–5).

40 D. Massey, *For Space*.

41 Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 51–52; 64.

42 Lord Dalhousie, the nineteenth-century governor general of India, quoted in C. Wolmar (2010) *Blood, Iron and Gold: How the Railways Transformed the World*, Atlantic Books, p. 49; on the city and the Department Store cf. also Simmel, Metropolis and Mental Life; W. Schivelbusch (1995) *Disenchanted Night*, University of California Press.

43 See R. Williams (1973) *The Country and the City*, Chatto & Windus on the transformation of "structures of feeling" in the process of modernization.

44 Urry, *Mobilities*, p. 275. C. Wolmar (2010) *Blood, Iron and Gold: How the Railways Transformed the World*, Atlantic Books, p. 217.

45 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 61.

46 W. Schivelbusch (1986) *The Railway Journey*, University of California Press.

47 Josef Maria von Radowitz, quoted in Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, p. 54.

48 J. Ruskin, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 8 p. 159 quoted in Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, p. 54.

49 A. Trachtenberg (1986) Introduction, in Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, pp. xiv; 38–39.

50 Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, pp. 72, 11, 14.

51 Cf. Trachtenberg, Introduction, pp. xiii; xv. Here, beyond these historical changes in structures of sensibility, we need also to consider the shifting relations between modes of transport and questions of embodiment (and the potentially transformative effects of transport modalities on the latter) G. Votolato (2007) *Transport Design*, Reaktion Books. Thus, modernity entailed replacing walking with sitting, and Urry speaks of the car driver being "strapped into a comfortable, if constraining armchair" within their own sanctuary of protection, "like a living room on wheels" – Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 76, 88, 127. In the same way, Virilio speaks of the modern traveler as increasingly "squeezed into his upholstered ... armchair" rather like a mummified moving body: P. Virilio (2005) *Negative Horizon* quoted in Adey, *Mobility*, p. 205.

52 Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 97–8, 103; Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 16.

53 Urry, *Mobilities*.

54 Urry, *Mobilities*, p. 116.

55 Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 119–121, 116.

56 Urry, *Mobilities*, p. 174.

57 J. Tomlinson (2007) *The Culture of Speed*, Sage Books, p. 2; see also S. Sharma (2008) Review of John Tomlinson *Culture of Speed*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 (2), 249; Simmel, The Metropolis and Mental Life.

58 Z. Bauman (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press; Z. Bauman (2005) *Liquid Life*, Polity Press.

59 Tomlinson, *Culture of Speed*, pp. 77, 83.

60 Cf. B. Latour (1991) *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvester Press.

61 For cycles of technology development, see T. Wu (2012) *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires*, Atlantic Books – especially for his stress on the importance of not mistaking a predictable stage in a product cycle for an entirely new development.

62 O. Lofgren (2006) Taking Place, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom, pp. 304, 302, 301, 305; see also T. Davies (1984) Transports of Pleasure, in T. Bennett (ed.), *Formations of Pleasure*, Routledge on railways and travel reading.

63 F. Jameson (1992) *Postmodernism, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso; D. Harvey (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell; E. Soja (1989) *Postmodern Geographies*, Verso.

64 Cf. J. May and N. Thrift (eds.) (2001) *Timespace*, Routledge; see also J.-P. Rodrigue with C. Comtois and B. Slack (2006) *Geography of Transport Systems*, Routledge, on the specific mechanics of processes of time/space compression.

65 Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, p. 34.

66 C. Marvin (1988/2004) *When Old Technologies Were New*, Oxford University Press/MIT Press; D. Edgerton (2006) *The Shock of the Old*, Profile Books; V. Mosco (2005) *The Digital Sublime*, MIT Press.

67 M. Wigley (2002) Resisting the City, in J. Brouwer, A. Mulder, and L. Marz (eds.), *Transurbanism*, Nai Publishing, pp. 107, 112, 116.

68 R. John (1995) *Spreading the News: The American Postal System*, Harvard University Press, p. 10; M. Nordau (1982) *Degeneration*, quoted in O. Lofgren Taking Place, p. 301.

69 R. Lynd and H. Lynd (1929) *Middletown*, p. 5; quoted in G. Bolin 'Electronic Geographies' p. 68; J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (2006) (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom.

70 Seneca (2004) *On The Shortness of Life*, Penguin pp. 42–44. He goes on to explain that "the whole of the Italian coast which is washed by the lower sea was once Greater Greece ... there is a crowd of Athenians in Asia; Asia claims the Etruscans as her own; Tyrians live in Africa; Phoenicians in Spain; Greeks penetrated into Gaul and Gauls into Greece."

71 Cf. Edgerton, *Shock of the Old*.

72 Cf. Wolmar, *Blood, Iron and Gold* and Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*.

73 Even if post-“9/11” security issues now put a significant brake on all such things.

74 Votolato *Transport Design*, p. 110.

75 Cf. G. Therborn (2002) Asia and Europe in the World, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 3 (2), 293.

76 Therborn, Asia and Europe in the World, 293; N. De Genova (2012) Perplexity/Mobility, quoting United Nations (2002) *International Migration Report*, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat.

77 Cf. A. Ghosh (1992) *In an Antique Land*, Granta. Amitai Ghosh writes of his surprise at discovering that many of the men of village he had gone to study in what he had presumed to be simply a “quiet corner of the Nile Delta” had (like their grandfathers before them) travelled and worked abroad extensively and had “passports so thick they opened out like ink-blackened concertinas”; see also Seneca’s comments on the “ordinariness” of long-distance migration among the soldiers of the Roman Empire – quoted in Appadurai and Morley, *Decoding, Diaspora and Disjuncture* 2012.

4

Disaggregating Mobilities

Zoning, Exclusion, and Containment

Introduction

Mobilities are always both complex and contradictory, and their study also involves those “immobile infrastructures that organize the flow of people, information, and images, as well as the borders and “gates” that limit, channel, and regulate that movement.”¹ Mobile “machines” – whether cars, trains, planes, or phones – themselves presume and depend on fixed and immobile “moorings” of different sorts (road networks, stations, airports, phone masts). As Saskia Sassen puts it, increased mobility often goes hand in hand with the “pronounced territorial concentration of the resources necessary to the management of that mobility.”² As Anselm Franke says, these infrastructural “realizations of power in space,” centering on transport and communications, regulate both movement and stasis for different sections of the population. Thus “much as highways, media networks and pipelines may connect they also divide; much as they integrate they also dis-integrate; as much as they compress time and value in space for some, they devalue it for others who have to remain immobile.”³ Furthermore, connectivity also has a dialectical relationship with exclusion: if a new “hub” serves to bring some places closer together, it simultaneously makes other places, outside the network, seem further apart in relative terms.

Relative Mobilities and the (Continued) Friction of Distance

Precisely to the extent that contemporary society can be characterized by mobility, differential mobilities closely reflect (and themselves constitute) structures and hierarchies of power. The critical issue here is the relation between geographical movement and different modalities of social mobility.

As indicated by the claim in his title that “if mobility is everything then it is nothing,” Peter Adey is concerned to develop a better theorization of the differences between various forms of mobility rather than to render the world as a formless “gloop” of liquidity (as he tartly implies that other perspectives tend to do). From his position, while “the world can be seen in terms of mixtures and flows”⁴ and insofar as everything is mobile, it is all the more essential to distinguish the different forms, rates, and modalities of *relative* mobility and immobility within this overall flux.

Here we also need to focus on the factors governing differential mobility in terms of available transport technologies and techniques for the regulation of both on- and off-line territories.⁵ Moreover, as Appadurai notes, there are often very significant disjunctures between these flows of messages and people, and their different “logics of circulation” are, he claims producing a growing series of crises precisely because they are “growing ever *more* diverse and disjunct, in spatial scope, in speed and in tempo.”⁶ Certainly, in recent years, the deregulation of media and financial systems, alongside the capacity for computer-based communications to reach across vast distances in real time has meant that media-based cultural forms, along with financial capital, have become increasingly mobile across transnational borders, while the movement of persons across borders has been subjected to increasingly strict controls.

Transnational Mobilities: The Flow of Goods and the Control of Persons

In this age of transnational deregulation, people are far “less mobile than money, goods or ideas, as they remain ‘nationalized,’ dependent upon passports, visas, residence and labour qualifications.”⁷ If, in the earlier period of globalization, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the free movement of capital was combined with freedom of migration, nowadays free capital flows coexist with stringent restrictions on the flow of people. As Nicholas De Genova has noted, the current era is characterized by a contradiction between the economic discourse of liberal market capitalism, which recognizes the benefits that cheap immigrant labor power offers to a society (providing a relatively young, fit labor force educated at someone else’s expense), and the security-driven political discourse that increasingly deprives such migrants of all but temporary and provisional rights of residence and steadily tightens restrictions on those whose circumstances lead them towards the “wrong” sorts of mobility.⁸

Nowadays, as Eric Kluitenberg notes, “borders are opened only selectively, on the basis of particular socio-economic criteria, and are increasingly closed to the majority of the world’s population,” who are “excluded from the privileges of sovereign transnational hypermobility.”⁹ Drawing on Virilio’s concept

of “polar inertia” he describes how, amid the accelerating flows of data and commodities “the biological body itself” is allowed only a shrinking amount of “elbow room” and is increasingly forced into a state of immobility.¹⁰ Thus, one of the Moroccan novelist Tahar Ben Jelloun’s fictional would-be migrants, stuck on the dockside in Tangier and wishfully fantasizing that he could travel as easily as a package of commercial goods, explains, “I’ve got the right to envy those crates of merchandise! I’d like to be one of them … delivered to a warehouse … in the land of prosperity and freedom. A simple … anonymous crate.”¹¹

Contained Mobility

Contemporary mobility systems display a peculiar articulation of both openness and closure,¹² and as Florian Schneider observes, they are increasingly characterized by the differentiation and modulation of particular rights of passage, which are only granted temporarily, or conditionally. This is also the logic of Ursula Biemann’s concept of “contained mobility,” according to which, many are allowed only temporary rights over where they can live or stay. It is also a logic in which the passage from one territory to another often involves compulsory transformations of identity as “engineers turn into cleaners … [and] academics … into casual farm labourers, or domestic workers.”¹³ As Biemann’s puts it, the “vagabond” increasingly

comes ashore in an off-shore place, in a container world that only “tolerates” the trans-local state of *not* being of this place, nor of any other really – but of existing in a condition of permanent not-belonging, of juridical non-existence. He comes to signify the itinerant body, bound to string along a chain of territories, never reaching a final destination, probing the protocols of access time and again. He moves through non-civil places, waits for “status” in off-social spaces… What used to be a state of temporary exemption – survival in the fluid timespace of legal deferral – is slowly consolidated into the prime mode of migratory subsistence. The site of this existence is connected but segregated: it is the world system of contained mobility.¹⁴

This is, indeed, the fate of many poor would-be migrants in the contemporary world, whose lives are contained within ever narrower limits, living as they do in the legal cracks of the global system. They are swept up into an “odyssey of deferral, transit and legal limbo” within an existential “geography of refusal” in which, while “permanently excluded” from the rights of citizenship, they remain “irremediably attached to the mirage of inclusion.”¹⁵ Notwithstanding his own emphasis on liquidity as the central metaphor of our age, even Zygmunt Bauman readily distinguishes between the “tourists”

of the postmodern world, whose credit rating makes them welcome wherever they wish to go, and the “vagabonds,” who have difficulty in getting a visa to go anywhere at all.¹⁶ As he has noted, even in an era marked, for some, by cosmopolitanism, migration, and mass tourism, there are those who remain “locals by fate, rather than by choice,”¹⁷ and many refugees end up locked away in “nowherevilles.”¹⁸

Contemporary Borders: The Transnational Ban-Opticon

However, the locus of border control is, to some extent, shifting. If, in a previous era, as Charlotte Lebbe puts it, the “supervision of … [cross-border] flows of people, goods and information was one of the basic functions of the Westphalian nation-state,” this function is now undermined by the way in which nation-states are increasingly grouping themselves into regional trading groups or polities, such as the European Union, the European Free Trade Area, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Central American Common Market, the North American Free Trade Agreement trade bloc and the Gulf Cooperation Council.¹⁹ Rather than systems of control being limited simply to the borders of a nation state, they increasingly “fold and shift” both outwards, into a supranational hinterland, and/or inward (to the CCTV cameras at the traffic junctions of any city).²⁰

In this respect, the control of external borders is now complemented by a set of embedded “bordering regimes” that operate both inside and beyond the territory of the nation-state itself. As Kluitenberg puts it, this involves a more differentiated form of filtering, according to particular socioeconomic profiles, so that “privileges such as the right of establishment and/or residence, access to knowledge, infrastructure and services, are granted to certain actors [or institutions] or social groups” while being denied to those who fail to fit the desired profile.²¹ Thus “mobility is not for everyone,” insofar as these Ban-optical databases “determine who has a right to it and who does not,” as Lebbe notes.²² What we see here is “the shift from a system of control to a proactive system of selection and exclusion” that divides the kinetic elite, for whom travelling to exotic places is part of the good life, from the majority: those who are “stuck in local … circumstances, in which they can no longer find protection.”²³ This new system of managing movement and flows is not just designed to exclude those whom the risk management systems identify as needing to be checked further but also to facilitate speeds of transit for those with good credentials, putting them in the “fast lane.” To this extent, these databases are not simply tools for the “management of unease” but also themselves “vehicles” for the constitution of specified and differentiated forms of mobility. As Eyal Wiewzman puts it, “within this larger system, architecture operates as a valve regulating

the flow of passengers under the volatile global regime of security. The location of government is thus shifted to transport modes and networks and the function of government is that of a valve, modulating the mobility regime.”²⁴

Metaphorical and Actual Mobilities: Fast and Slow Lanes

In postmodern discourse, the airport – and specifically its departure lounge – has now become a well-worn metaphor symbolizing a cosmopolitan and dynamic culture of placelessness, dynamism, and flow.²⁵ However, as Tim Cresswell argues, this metaphorical construal of airports as “spaces of pure motion” or “avatars of a brave new... post-national world,” mistakes the specific experience of the seamless mobility of the kinetic elite for an undifferentiated condition of global nomadism.²⁶ Indeed, within the world of aeromobility, surveillance systems function to shape the experience of the elite of first-class passengers, which is increasingly distinguished, in its relative seamlessness and comfort, from that of the low-speed masses, for whom the “friction of distance” is much less easily overcome. In this respect, airports that function as “connection hubs” are designed not only to enable speed but also to exercise control over persons moving between differently designed “zones.” Thus these hubs link the globalized flows required by hypermobility, but in a controlled and selective manner.

As noted in Chapter 2, in relation to his analysis of Schipol, Cresswell offers a carefully differentiated analysis of the airport as “a processing machine for mobile bodies,” whose business is the production of a variable typology of mobilities, based on the price of your ticket and the nature of your official documentation. Thus, the airport continually “processes” its passengers, enacting a series of thresholds for mobility, allowing the “trustworthy” to move at speed while immobilizing those deemed problematic. The mobilities of citizens and aliens, of budget tourists and business travellers, are highly differentiated, and the “geopolitics of mobility at a micro scale” is made evident as the airport’s screening procedures intersect with bodily mobilities.²⁷ A proliferation of technologies and gatekeeping devices “sort” these populations, and the less privileged must enact their connections and organize their affairs “on street corners, subway stations, buses, public plazas and back alleys” using low-grade technologies such as “payphones, beepers ... or STMS messaging.”²⁸

In terms of the distinctive kind of social relations constructed by their architecture and design, as Aharon Kellerman notes, airport terminals can be considered as “the most authoritarian facility designed for the use of free civilians,” being typified by the wide “base, amount, domain and scope” of their authoritarian powers. The “airport authoritarianism” to which their users are subject involves a range of instant and punitive forms of compulsion, ranging from direct

instruction of passengers by various types of staff to forms of directional signage designed to dictate the spatial flow of passengers in accordance with airport authorities' directives.²⁹

All this implies that, as Cresswell argues, we should relinquish any fantasy of "mobility as a natural ... right of autonomous moving subjects" and instead understand contemporary mobility as a social construction of kinetic hierarchy produced within asymmetrical power systems.³⁰ Ultimately, different categories of mobility are produced by is the law, on the basis of the "state monopolization of the legitimate means of movement."³¹ This is the system that authorizes (or prohibits) the mobility of different of persons, variously categorized as citizens, denizens, fugitives, minors, aliens, tramps, the indigent, or the infected), and thus creates a variety of "pathological mobilities."³²

Consigned to the Perimeters: Zoning the Nation

If we turn now from international to intranational forms of mobility, we see that in many countries, the economics of the housing market, along with housing policies and town planning mechanisms, tend to produce separate residential zones for members of different social classes. Increasingly, poor people are consigned to areas at considerable physical distance from desirable resources such as schools, shops, and hospitals. These tend to be areas where services such as banks, ATMs, supermarkets, pharmacies, phone companies, and Internet services are reluctant to invest – and from which some services are already withdrawing. As these areas also tend to have poor physical transport links to the outside world, their inhabitants face ever increasing difficulty (and expense) in accessing essential services. Insofar as transport and communications systems constitute the "technical infrastructure required for the multiple kinds of mobility characteristic of the contemporary city," their restricted mobility constitutes the spatial dimension of their social exclusion. As mobility is, in effect, a compulsory requirement for access to necessary resources in contemporary urban space, in many cities, the poor are doubly punished: their homes are located further and further away from the resources they need, while the transport facilities available to them are both inadequate and expensive, as Sebastian Ureta shows in his study of Santiago.³³

There, he reports, the system demands increasingly high degrees of spatial mobility of the poor – and many of them routinely spend more than four hours a day commuting to and from work – while offering them only inadequate and expensive (not to mention uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous) transport facilities, in the form of a broken-down privatized bus service. These people perceive their own environment as unsafe, and thus they tend to restrict their "public" activities (and those of their children) to their own house or street, except when unavoidable trips must be made for work,

education, shopping, or other needs. To this extent, their social exclusion is reinforced across a number of different material and technological dimensions – and they are increasingly confined to realms that are “remote” in every sense. As one of them puts it: “here, you have nothing at hand ... no supermarkets ... nothing ... where ever you want to go, you have to take a bus ... it is as if we were ... far away ... from everything, like in an un-civilisation.”³⁴ These emotive and imaginative dimensions of exclusion are crucial in constituting the subjectivities of those who live in these areas and come to define the horizons of their sense of possibility.³⁵

Social justice is a matter not only of income inequalities but also, as Julian Hine notes, “a geographical problem involving distance, movement and access.”³⁶ In this context Iain Docherty, Geneviève Giuliano, and Donald Houston argue that “the transport infrastructure, together with the resources available to ... [them] ... determines each individual’s mobility ... [while] ... the spatial arrangement of activities and households determines accessibility.”³⁷ Thus, the unequal distribution of mobility is a problem of social justice, in terms of which resources are accessible to different people, whether by virtual or material means.³⁸ The social exclusion of those living in deprived or marginal areas is also constituted by transport-poverty, which restricts their access to jobs, services, and facilities and thus “disables” their full social participation. As Robert Gant notes, it is the poor, ethnic minorities, women, the elderly, and disabled children who are most likely to be excluded from transport provision.³⁹ As these are also the groups least likely to have access to private car transport, they are doubly disadvantaged, as even basic shopping facilities are increasingly consolidated into out-of-town retail parks. Moreover, they are also those most likely to suffer collateral damage (noise and pollution) in the blighted neighborhoods in which they tend to live, as a result of the “negative externalities” imposed by the transport links used by their more affluent fellow citizens. Thus, while their own mobility is very constrained, they are often “subjected to the ... noise of motorways and airports or ... of high-speed trains.”⁴⁰ This process has been described by Nigel Thrift as involving a form of empowering “super-inclusion” for the favored groups that extends their potential “activity spaces” while poorer communities are further marginalized by their relative exclusion from network infrastructures and technologies and are increasingly confined in places characterized by Loic Wacquant as “zones of advanced marginality.”⁴¹

Aeromobilities: Above the Madding Crowd

To the extent that everything in contemporary society – people, goods, money, and information – is in movement, speed becomes a vital criterion of evaluation, and attention is drawn to any restrictions on mobility, such as traffic congestion. In this context, vertical flight, as represented, for instance, by helicopter

travel, offers a particularly gratifying solution. As Saulo Cwerner demonstrates, fantasies of vertical flight (focused in particular on the helicopter, with its promise of seemingly unhindered, frictionless, personal, seamless, door-to-door transportation) have long played a major role in the modern imagination of spatial mobility.⁴² Indeed, as Gregory Votolato notes, in the mid-twentieth century there was widespread fantasy that one day, private individuals would all have planes, just as they had come to have cars as a form of personalized mobility.⁴³ In this context the helicopter promises “instant access” to key, central sites and “unhindered personal … mobility … unencumbered by the prevailing chaos in the road and public transport systems below.”⁴⁴ In the context of their analysis of what they call “splintering urbanism,” Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin note that, in this respect, “personal helicopters are the logical conclusion of all other secessionary processes, in that [they] finally release their users from dependency on sharing the city’s highways with the rest of its inhabitants” and allow them to move seamlessly from the security of their apartments to that of their offices.⁴⁵

As Cwerner observes, it is in São Paulo that these processes are perhaps most clearly observed, and we find there the strange combination of one of the most utopian versions of the dream of urban vertical flight in one of the world’s most dystopian cities. The city provides an example of extreme urban sprawl and chaos with dramatic levels of social and economic inequality and a particularly congested road system. By way of escape from these difficulties, its urban elite has developed a very large helicopter fleet, making the city the “helicopter capital” of the world, by means of which they simply bypass the chaos and congestion beneath them. In this respect, the helicopter is best seen as a part – and highly visible symbol – of the culture of personal and household security in which the elite live (the mobile equivalent of their gated communities).

By contrast to the experiences of the rich middle classes, who increasingly travel directly to and from the “heli-pads” on the rooftops of their apartment buildings, the maids who come into São Paulo to clean their apartments and cook their meals must often travel for four to five hours each way by bus, to and from the outlying *favelas* where they live.⁴⁶ Even when they live in close physical proximity to each other, the mobile wealthy and the immobile poor still live in different worlds. As John Adams notes, in many cities the poor are dependent for their (second-class forms of) mobility on the withered remains of public transport while “the wealthy can be seen and heard, flying overhead, driving along motorways through the ghettos, appearing on television, [and] enjoying privileges which remain out of reach. To the wealthy, the poor are often invisible; the wealthy tend to see the world at a lower resolution, because of the height and speed at which they travel.”⁴⁷ To return to the example of São Paulo, helicopter traffic there is a highly visible daily event, and its noisy impact is felt by most people in the city; Thus Cwerner speaks of “the almost existential intrusion of helicopters in everyday life, where normal routines can often, literally, be shaken

by a helicopter flying close by." All this creates a "new landscape of power" where "the promise of vertical flight, instead of delivering the ubiquitous means of personal mobility that its early proponents dreamed of, imposes both an architecture and an environment of privilege and exclusion."⁴⁸

Hierarchies of Mobility and Connexity

If "connexity" is considered as a valuable form of economic and cultural capital that is very unevenly distributed, then we must address some extremely basic questions, such as who has access to which levels and modes of transport and communications: who goes by foot, bicycle, car, train, ship, or plane? Who is allowed into a particular material or virtual space? Among the key issues here are the questions of how different types of transport engender very different experiences of travel and how the relative status of any particular mode "rubs off" on those who use it. At the international level, borders can be highly emotional places – involving frustration, humiliation, and subjugation for some passengers (especially those travelling via low status modes of transport), who are subjected to passport checks of varying degrees of rigor while others enjoy the gratification of being "waived through" on the basis of a perfunctory check of their ID card.⁴⁹

Thus, Ivaylo Ditchev writes that, in travelling in the Balkans "you enter a different country, depending on [your] means of transportation. [In some cases] there is the glorious descent by plane, with nice airports and Europeanised border officers." This, he observes, is the kind of travel experience that encourages people to think we have arrived at the "end of geography." However, he adds, there are also those who make their journeys on "the shabby, aging train ... in which you secure the door with your necktie against intrusions, and play cards with strangers on attaché cases." Further down the social ladder, "buses circulate full of 'suitcase traders' asked to get off at each border, to stand in a line and open their luggage for checking." Of course, as he notes, at the bottom of the transport hierarchy, are "those who cross borders on foot, led by obscure guides, at night." As he reflects, only by making such distinctions can one understand how different the experience of the journey across the same border can be "when two cars stop at the same checkpoint: one expensive and shiny, where some black-spectacled driver hands over the documents through stained glass windows, the other old and suspicious, which the customs officers will turn upside down in search of traces of crime."⁵⁰

On the Bus: The Losers' Vehicle of Last Resort

Bus and coach travel, in the affluent West, besides being a stressful, uncomfortable, and physically demanding activity (often involving carrying heavy luggage over long distances while negotiating bewildering way stations), is evidently a

particularly low-status mode of travel. Thus, in her analysis of the constricted mobility options for the poor of Los Angeles, Sikivu Hutchinson describes the buses there as the “city of women,” a setting in which we see the convergence of gendered inequality with that of “the raced body, the transient, the low-income immigrant.”⁵¹ Moreover, this perception of their lack of status rubs off on those who are forced to depend on these modes of transport, to their considerable embarrassment.

Individual transport choices are not made in a cultural vacuum, and the gross assumptions of theories of “economic man” notwithstanding, cannot simply be assessed as matters of rational maximization of consumer satisfaction. Our choices are made in the broader context of our cultural and social identities, and we have to consider questions of affect, emotion, and symbolism in this realm as much as any other. Questions of transport, whether at macro or micro levels, can never be entirely reduced to matters of economics, nor of rational functionality. Thus the car, for instance, brings not simply greater functional convenience but also a positive sense of autonomy and “being in control.” Conversely, people’s reluctance to use public transport is often affected by questions of self-image as much as by their anxieties about safety and uncertainty as to the reliability of timetabled services. Insofar as personal mobility is a symbol of status and success, public transport often comes to be perceived as the preserve of the unsuccessful.⁵² For instance, in the United Kingdom, many people now see buses as a mode of transport of last resort suitable only for those who can afford no better and largely reserved for those who, being consigned to the ranks of the unemployable, have so much time on their hands that they are prepared to spend much of it sitting on a bus in order to save small amounts of money.⁵³ In the British context, it is also useful to recall here Mrs. Thatcher’s famous observation that “a man who, over the age of 26, finds himself travelling by bus, can count himself a failure.”⁵⁴

The Politics of Waiting

As we have seen, globalization is a highly selective process that works by “linking up” that which can be deemed to generate economic value while simultaneously discarding places, people, companies, or territories that have become “devalued.” To this extent, the defining measurements of the globalization system are rates of speed and connectivity, which then differentiate between the “hot zones” of the Fast World and the hypertrophied areas of stagnation in the “zones of abandonment” of those left behind.⁵⁵

The tropes of mobility tend to be articulated through a “productivist” discourse in which speed, hyperactivity, and multitasking are assumed to be the ideal state of being and “waiting” is, by contrast, understood as a temporal void (or regrettable aberration) of “dead” or “suspended” time.⁵⁶ The underlying

presumption is that inactivity, slowness, and stasis are bad because they are “unproductive.” It is in this context that a whole range of mobile communications technologies (the mobile phone, laptop, or iPod) have been successfully marketed as desirable – precisely so far as that they offer the Lazarus-like capacity to transform what is presumed to be the otherwise “dead” time of a journey into productive (or at least, more pleasurable) time.⁵⁷

In his commentary on Paul Virilio’s concept of the home as the “last vehicle,” Wim Nijenhuis uses as an example a European BMW car advert showing a businessman being driven fast along a motorway in the rain who “pays no attention to the landscape rushing by, because he is occupied with information coming at him at a speed the car can never reach.” The advert’s businessman thus exists in an environment that “exudes the feel of an imperturbable interior” insofar as, by virtue of his reading lamp, mobile phone, and laptop, he “inhabits the time of … electronic information that simultaneously … fixes the car in the relatively inert form of a traceable and localisable abode.” As Nijenhuis notes, this fusion of dwelling and vehicle is described by Virilio as a “habitacle.”⁵⁸

Nonetheless, for Virilio there is also some metaphorical sense in which ours is a society in which we are all increasingly “waiting in front of some communications apparatus … lining up at toll booths, poring over checklists, sleeping with computer consoles on [our] night stands.”⁵⁹ However, rather than taking Virilio’s observation to have generalizable applicability, we might perhaps better follow Tahar Ben Jelloun in understanding waiting as principally “the new profession of the poor.”⁶⁰ Certainly, in many discussions of the contemporary “culture of speed,” the often overlooked question concerns its obverse: waiting – the fate of those who lack the qualifications which give access to the relevant “fast-track” or priority lane. Thus, while it may only take the business traveler 12 hours to fly from Beijing to Toronto, it may take up to a year for illegal migrants to get from China to Canada by ship, as they must sometimes spend weeks waiting, at various strategic points on their journey, in order to evade customs and border controls.⁶¹ At a more quotidian level, this is also the issue raised by Doreen Massey when she queries the extent to which a working-class woman in a deprived area waiting at a bus stop for an infrequent service to her nearest supermarket can be said to experience any significant degree of time–space compression.⁶² To this extent, one might argue that the amount of “waiting” in which a person is forced to engage is, increasingly, a good index of their social status.⁶³

Given the prevalence of this form of (in)activity, we should perhaps attend more closely to what David Bissell calls these “landscapes of waiting.” Here he refers to the importance of the “container spaces” of waiting, whether in their material forms (e.g., shelters, benches, platforms, waiting rooms, traffic lights) or their more fleeting forms – such as queues or traffic jams.⁶⁴ However, it is not only a question of the relative speed of journeys actually made. In this

context Fiona Raje also focuses on those who remain static for reasons of lack of access to mobility opportunities – and thus brings attention to the important concept of “journeys forgone, suppressed or not undertaken” because of various barriers to mobility.⁶⁵

Techno-Prosthetic Mobility as a Condition of Citizenship

If human capacities have long been augmented by material technologies – such as clothing, tools, paths, and building, today software-based systems of virtual technology redistribute economies, peoples, and activities across the world, providing them with different affordances and experiences.⁶⁶ Thus “what we call the social is materially heterogeneous: talk, bodies, texts, machines and architectures ... all are implicated in and perform the social.”⁶⁷ Crucial here, as Manuel Castells notes “is the extension and augmentation of the body and mind of human subjects in networks of interaction powered by micro-electronics based software-operated communication technologies ... [which] are increasingly diffused throughout the ... realm of human activity by miniaturisation [and portability].”⁶⁸ Network sociality depends on the use of this complex set of technologies and is constituted through a mix of virtual and actual encounters – face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and e-mails, etc. – as media are increasingly continuous with and embedded in everyday life.⁶⁹ If, as James Clifford observed many years ago now, the “to and fro made possible by modern technologies of transport and communication ... reduces distances and facilitates two-way traffic, legal and illegal around the world,” we are now faced with a complex set of “old and emerging technologies that reconstruct notions of proximity and distance, closeness and farness, stasis and movement.”⁷⁰

One key issue here concerns the distribution of network capital, which may take the form of the possession (or lack) of physical capacities to move; the economic means to purchase movement options; the possession of communications technologies and competences necessary to arrange movement; access to modes of physical transport devices; having the requisite official documents; and having “time sovereignty” over the scheduling of one’s movements.⁷¹ Just as economists argue that networking accrues value through a process in which the more people have a particular technology, the more its affordances become necessities, so there comes a point where *not* to have access to a particular technology, is to be excluded from the network it constitutes and hence unable to function effectively as a “communicative citizen.”

Mobile bodies can also be seen to have at their disposal very different repertoires of “prosthetic devices” – whether a wheelchair or a guide dog for a disabled person, or a car, bus, train, or bicycle for the able-bodied. In this model, the mobility of the “prosthetic subject citizen” has to be understood as being

produced within wider “material landscapes of mobility and stasis” and within “networks of institutions and technologies that enable and/or disable mobility.”⁷² One dramatic example of the determining significance of this “prosthetic” mobility is provided by Cresswell’s analysis of the fate of the largely black “mobility poor,” who were left stranded in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. The basic problem was that the evacuation plans publicized by the city authority advising people to leave assumed that any “normal citizen” would naturally have their mobility prosthetically augmented by the possession of a private automobile. To this extent, the authorities simply made no provision for the large “carless” minority of poor blacks who had no way of leaving in advance of the flood, once the bus and train services were cancelled. As he observes, the city authorities’ response to the hurricane thus effectively immobilized the vulnerable citizens of the city – those who needed the most help.⁷³ Conversely, middle-class white people were able to flee the disaster precisely because they possessed the relevant forms of “network capital”: the communications technologies to receive the required information and private cars that allowed them to follow the evacuation instructions given by those in charge of policing the disaster. In order to understand the role of prosthetic technologies in constituting modes of citizenship we need to think of a continuum of possibilities in access to communications and transport technologies of different types.⁷⁴ The uneven microgeography of access to these technologies plays a crucial role in enabling any particular person to overcome the friction of physical distance.

Visible and Invisible Geographies

Beyond these issues there is also the question of the sociotechnical construction of the relative (in)visibility of different geographical places and routes for different categories of person living in the same location. Zygmunt Bauman describes a striking example of this when he recounts how, on visiting a southern European city and being picked up at the airport by his middle-class host, the journey from the airport to his hotel took them nearly two hours because of the heavy traffic. When, at the point of departure, his host offered to drive him back to the airport, Bauman declined, feeling that it was too much to ask her to spend another two hours driving him about, and he took a cab instead. To his great surprise, the return journey to the airport took less than 10 minutes, although it did mean driving through the slums of the city. As he comments,

my host’s assurances that there was no way to avoid the city centre traffic [through which they had crawled on Bauman’s arrival – D.M.] was no pretence. They were sincere and faithful to her mental map of the city ...

that map simply did not record the unsightly streets of the rough district through which the taxi took me. In [her] mental map [of the city], in the place where those street should have been plotted, there was purely and simply an empty space.⁷⁵

In a similar spirit to that of Bauman's example, one of my Taiwanese students at Goldsmiths recounted witnessing an exchange between an old lady trying to find her way from one part of Taipei to another and asking for help from a schoolboy. The old lady asked the boy if he knew which bus she needed to get to her destination, but he answered by telling her how much more efficient it would be for her to travel via the Taipei Rapid Transit System (MRT). The old lady explained that she simply did not know how to take the MRT – a form of ignorance that was absolutely incomprehensible to the boy, who was thoroughly familiar with that system but correspondingly ignorant of the bus network on which the old lady relied. As someone who was born in the Japanese colonial period and knew Taipei as a city principally connected by buses, long before the MRT was built, the old lady only felt at ease in a geographical knowledge based on the topography of the local bus lines. She and her young interlocutor, although occupying the same physical place, literally inhabited incommensurate conceptual universes – she inhabiting the planar space of the historical city and he inhabiting the topological space of flows, microelectronics, and circuit switching – to which his "EasyCard" gives him access with a confident "swipe" but which, by the same token, entirely excluded the old lady.⁷⁶

Having now established some of the parameters for the understanding of contemporary mobilities, in the next two chapters I will further explore the relations of topography and topology in the articulation of the material and virtual geographies in which we live.

Notes

- 1 K. Hannam, M. Sheller, and J. Urry (2006) Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings, *Mobilities* 1 (1).
- 2 S. Sassen (2002) *Global Networks, Linked Cities*, Routledge, p. 2.
- 3 A. Franke (2005) Introduction, in *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond*, Kunst Werke Berlin/Actar Publishing, p. 8.
- 4 P. Adey (2006) If Mobility is Everything, Then it is Nothing, *Mobilities* 1 (1), 82, 79.
- 5 Cf. A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.) (2011) *Online Territories: Globalisation, Mediated Practice and Social Space*, Peter Lang.
- 6 A. Appadurai (2006) *Fear of Small Numbers*, Duke University Press.
- 7 P. Hirst and G. Thomson (1999) *Globalisation in Question*, Polity Press, p. 257.

- 8 N. De Genova (2011) "The Perplexities of Mobility," Department of Anthropology, Goldsmiths College.
- 9 E. Kluitenberg (2011) Extreme Displacement, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im)Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, p. 11, 18.
- 10 Kluitenberg, Extreme Displacement, p. 11.
- 11 T. Ben Jelloun (2009) *Leaving Tangier*, Arcadia Books, p. 25.
- 12 B. Holmes (2011) Do Containers Dream of Electric People, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im)Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, p. 41.
- 13 F. Schneider (2011) Towards a Theory of Borders, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im) Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, p. 113; cf. John Lanchester's representation in his novel *Capital* of a Zimbabwean lawyer who now works as a traffic warden in London (J. Lanchester (2012) *Capital*, Faber).
- 14 U. Biemann (2010) Suspended in the Post-Humanist Lapse: Contained Mobility, in *Mission Reports: Artistic Practices in the Field/Video Works 1998–2008*, Bildmuseet/Arnolfini Gallery, pp. 55–61; cf. De Genova, "Perplexities of Mobility."
- 15 Holmes, Do Containers Dream of Electric People? pp. 33, 43.
- 16 Z. Bauman (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press.
- 17 Z. Bauman (2000) *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*, Polity Press, p. 100.
- 18 Z. Bauman (2003) *Liquid Love*, Polity Press, p. 142.
- 19 C. Lebbe (2011) The Ban-Opticon in the Schengen Area, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im)Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, p. 82.
- 20 Cf. Schneider, Towards a Theory, p. 112.
- 21 E. Kluitenberg quoted in J. Seijdel (ed.) (2011) *(Im)Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, p. 15.
- 22 M. Poste and D. Bigo in Lebbe, Ban-Opticon, pp. 83, 89, 90.
- 23 Lebbe, Ban-Opticon, pp. 80, 82.
- 24 E. Wiezman in M. Godfrey *et al.* (2010) Rights of Passage, in *Tate Modern Magazine* 19 (Summer), p. 63.
- 25 M. Auge (1995) *Non-Places*, Verso; I. Chambers (1990) *Border Dialogues*, Routledge; R. Braidotti (1994) *Nomadic Subjects*, Columbia University Press; P. Iyer (1995) Where Worlds Collide, *Harper's Magazine* (August). See also, for a more contemporary review, W. Self (2011) Aerotropolis, *London Review of Books* (April 28).
- 26 T. Cresswell (2006), *On the Move*, Routledge, pp. 255, 222.
- 27 Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 244, 239, 224; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, Editorial, 11.
- 28 Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, Editorial, 12.
- 29 A. Kellerman (2008) International Airports, *Mobilities* 3 (1), 166, 170.
- 30 Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 172–173.
- 31 Torpey quoted in Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 185.
- 32 Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 151, 158, 161. As Cresswell and Hoskins argue, an analysis of the specific ways in which the mobility of nineteenth-century Chinese immigrant laborers to the United States, were controlled, throws critical light on the foundational myth of the United States as a nation characterized by the

positive energies of mobility, adventure, and migrancy (T. Cresswell and G. Hoskins (2006) *Producing Immigrant Communities*, in Cresswell, *On The Move*, pp. 175 et seq.). Their argument is that, while it may be true that all of the nonindigenous population of the United States originally came from somewhere else, that story offers too simple an identification of migration, and the experience of mobility, as central to the American national character – as “restless, mobile people, differentiating them[selves] ideologically from the segmented rootedness of a stagnant and corrupt Europe.” This “imaginary geography” of a unified experience of mobility at the heart of America’s creation myth is then held to provide the basis of all the energies considered central to the nation’s success. However, as they insist, the positive meaning given to the mobility of white European migrants contrasts markedly with that given to the Chinese migrants, who were variously classified as “alien, inassimilable, uncivil, immoral, and unhealthy.” Thus, beyond its significance in America’s national history, they argue that “the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 marked one of the earliest moments in the development of a worldwide system for producing and limiting mobilities on a global scale” (Cresswell and Hoskins, *Producing Immigrant Communities*, pp. 175 et seq., pp. 193, 182 note 19, 182n. 19, 186).

- 33 S. Ureta (2008) To Move or Not to Move? Social Exclusion, Accessibility and Daily Mobility among the Low-Income Population in Santiago, Chile, *Mobilities* 3 (2), 273, 270.
- 34 Ureta, To Move or Not to Move, p. 281.
- 35 The point is well exemplified, in fictional terms, at the point in the television series *The Wire* when one of the local kids, who exists on the edge of the area’s drug trade, encouraged by a well-wishing teacher to think of going to college, then asks quite simply, “But how do you get to the rest of the world from here?” (*The Wire*, Series 1, Home Box Office). For the theoretical origins of this perspective, see the discussion of “activity spaces” in T. Hagerstrand (1985) *Time Geography*, in S. Aida (ed.), *The Science of Praxis of Complexity*, United Nations University.
- 36 J. Hine (2008) Transport and Social Justice, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell, p. 49.
- 37 I. Docherty, G. Giuliano, and D. Houston (2008) Connected Cities, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell, p. 84.
- 38 Cf. M. Moseley (1979) *Accessibility: The Rural Challenge*, Methuen, p. 56.
- 39 R. Gant (2002) Shopmobility at the Millenium: “Enabling” Access in Town Centres, *Journal of Transport Geography* 10, 123–133.
- 40 C. Charlton and T. Vowles quoted in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.) (2008) *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell, p. 134.
- 41 N. Thrift (1996) *Spatial Formations*, Sage; L. Wacquant (1996) The Rise of Advanced Marginality, *Acta Sociologica* 39, quoted in S. Graham (2001) The City As Sociotechnical Process, *City* 5 (3), 343, 348.
- 42 S. Cwerner (2006) Vertical Flight and Urban Mobilities, *Mobilities* 1 (2).
- 43 G. Votolato (2007) *Transport Design: A Travel History*, Reaction Books, p. 174.

44 Cwerner, Vertical Flight; cf. Kellerman, International Airports.

45 Cwerner, Vertical Flight, 198; S. Graham and S. Marvin quoted in Cwerner, Vertical Flight, 199; cf. Chapter 7 on other secessionary technologies.

46 Cf. Cwerner, Vertical Flight; J. Scudamore (2010) *Helropolis*, Vintage.

47 J. Adams (2008) Hypermobility, *Prospect* (March) p. 28.

48 Cwerner, Vertical Flight, 209, 211–212. See also P. Adey (2010) *Mobility*, Routledge, pp. 96–97. In fact, the transport situation for the poor of São Paulo has improved a little since Cwerner's article, as result of initiatives that have created more bus lanes, alongside provision for the city's growing population of cyclists. See http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/10/05/world/americas/mayor-fernando-haddad-of-sao-paolo-strives-to-ease-gridlock.html?referrer=&_r=0.

49 Cf. K. Burrell (2008) Materialising the Border: Spaces of Mobility and Material Culture in Post-Socialist Poland, *Mobilities* 3 (3), 358.

50 I. Ditchey (2006) Aesthetics of Travel, in F. von Hapsburg (ed.), *Kuba: Against the Current*, Thyssen-Bornemisza art Contemporary, p. 15. See also Proudhon's critique of the delusions of nineteenth-century enthusiasts for rail travel, who imagined that "all the hatreds ... and prejudices that separate people ... are going to evaporate" simply as a result of the "association of humankind by iron routes" – Proudhon, quoted in A. Mattelart (1996) *The Invention of Communication*, University of Minnesota Press, p. 146.

51 S. Hutchinson, quoted in Adey *Mobility*, p. iii.

52 J.P. Rodrigue, C. Comtois, and B. Slack (2006) *The Geography of Transport Systems*, Routledge, p. 190.

53 S. Stradling and G. Anable (2008) Individual Transport Patterns, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell.

54 Quoted in P.D. Smith (2012) The Car's Heyday Has Passed, *The Guardian* (Review) (September 8). Nonetheless, the power geometry of contemporary mobilities can sometimes take surprising forms. These days, in many metropolitan cities, it is the more affluent residents, whose lifestyle often involves a strong commitment to personal fitness, who are far more likely than the poor to regularly walk long distances. Indeed it might be said that the higher their salary the more likely a city dweller is to walk or cycle than to go on a local bus.

55 Cf. T. Friedman (2000) *The Lexus and The Olive Tree*, Harper Books; cf. P. Theroux (2003) *Dark Star Safari*, Penguin, p. 237 on poor countries as spaces of waiting.

56 Cf. H. Schweizer quoted in D. Bissell (2007) Animating Suspension, *Mobilities* 2 (2), 283; Moran on queuing, quoted in the same article by Bissell, p. 285.

57 Cf. R. Rettie (2008) Mobile Phones as Network Capital, *Mobilities* 3 (2); cf. my later discussion of this issue in Chapter 7. On the derivation of the term "Lazarus-like," see also N. Perry, K. O'Hara, A. Sellon, B. Brown, and R. Harper (2001) Dealing with Mobility, available at http://www.equator.ac.uk/Publication_Store

58 W. Nijenhuis (2011) Exit City: Home Everywhere and Nowhere, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im)Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, pp. 68, 70.

59 P. Virilio (2003) The Overexposed City, in A. Hoete (ed.), *ROAM: A Reader on the Aesthetics of Mobility*, Black Dog Publishing, p. 276; or perhaps, these days, with their smart phones under their pillows ...

60 Ben Jelloun, *Leaving Tangier*, p. 169.

61 See Chapter 9 for more on this issue.

62 D. Massey (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press, Part 2.

63 Cf. U. Schultz-Dornburg (2007) *Architectures of Waiting*, Verlag Buchanhandlung Walter Konig.

64 D. Bissell (2007) Animating Suspension: Waiting, *Mobilities* 2 (2), 282; cf. also A. McCarthy (2002) *Ambient Television*, Duke University Press on the importance of spaces of waiting in public life – quite literally, for example, “waiting rooms”: spaces in which the public are available as captive (and relatively powerless) audiences to be addressed by advertising.

65 F. Raje (2007) The Lived Experience of Transport Structure, *Mobilities* 2 (1) 52. However, David Bissell suggests that, rather than automatically devaluing waiting, in relation to (positively valued) mobility, we would do better to recognize it as “just one of the slowing rhythms that constitutes places of travel” within a relational politics of (im)mobilities. From this perspective, it is also matter of power: if “slowness” is *chosen* then it can be “recoded positively – as a matter of privilege/lifestyle choice” (as in “slow food”) – and slowing down can then be refigured as “chilling out,” as in choosing to wait to travel through the city after the rush hour, if you have the kind of job that allows you that flexibility. Bissell, Animating Suspension, 284; P. Adey quoted in Bissell, Animating Suspension, 283.

66 J. Urry (2007) *Mobilities*, Polity Press, pp. 160–161.

67 J. Law quoted in Urry, *Mobilities*, p. 34.

68 M. Castells quoted in Urry, *Mobilities*, p.162.

69 J. Urry (2002) Mobility and Proximity, *Sociology* 36 (2), 268–269; cf. N. Couldry and A. McCarthy (eds.) (2004) *Mediaspace*, Routledge on this “interweaving.”

70 J. Clifford (1997) *Routes*, University of California Press, p. 247; Urry, Mobility and Proximity, 271.

71 Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 192, 197–198.

72 Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 166–167; C. Langan (2001) Mobility Disability, *Public Culture* 13 (3).

73 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 264.

74 Cf. P. Adams (2009) *Geographies of Media and Communication*, Wiley Blackwell p. 219.

75 Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 104.

76 Y.-C. Liu MA Digital Media, Goldsmiths 2008–2009, personal communication.

5

Geography, Topography, and Topology

Networks and Infrastructures

Nearness and Farness: Geographical Proximity and Topological Connexity

One of the founding assumptions of geography has always been that, given the resource costs of mobility, interaction will vary in direct relation to the extent of physical distance involved. Insofar as questions of location, mobility, and transport have been addressed as matters of economic geography, the tendency has been towards a deductive mode of abstract analysis based on the assumption that economic activity takes place on a neutral, featureless surface.¹ Mathematical models of economic rationality have been used to explain the effects of geographical distance on location, with transport viewed simply as a factor representing the costs of overcoming the “friction” of distance. But given the development of the teletechnologies amidst which we live, we have now to think not only of material space, but also time–space and cost space, which are no longer necessarily commensurate.²

In this new geography, the capacities of a person or organization are now extended into the virtual spheres that allow for new modalities of social interaction “separate and distinct from the spatial relations of linear distance and contiguity.”³ Using Torsten Hagerstrand’s concept of an individual’s “activity space” in combination with Donald Janelle’s notion of mediated forms of “extensibility,” Adams argues that the Internet, by increasing the range of people’s capacity to act, can be seen as analogous to the effect of a vehicle on embodied forms of mobility. Thus Mei-Po Kwan argues that we need to develop hybrid measures of these forms of “extensibility” of personal action, in both virtual and material realms, given people’s engagements with diverse geographical scales through both face-to-face interaction and the use of a variety of information and communications technologies.⁴ In these interactions, “complex place and transport-based relational meanings … are constantly being recombined with local and nonlocal relational connections, accessed via technological networks,” as Steven

Graham notes.⁵ As telecommunications technologies are ever more diffused throughout our everyday lives, we increasingly live in a hybrid blend of physical and virtual spaces, in the midst of a “recursive process [that] exists as the virtual is realised and the real virtualised.”⁶

In this connection, Michel Serres and Bruno Latour explain that their approach is driven by the attempt to produce a “philosophical geography” offering “a science of proximities and ongoing or interrupted transformations.”⁷ They aim to go beyond questions of nearness or distance, measured in absolute space, the better to understand places in dynamic and relational terms (where “nearness” is a matter of degree of connexity rather than a quality measurable in miles on Euclidean diagrams).⁸ In relation to these issues, in recent years, it has widely been argued that “networking logics” constitute the new social morphology of our times,⁹ given the new scope, reach, and capacity of various networks to produce more or less enduring connections across space and through time, between people and things. In this context, what becomes significant is not absolute but relative location (the degree of “connexity” between nodes in a network), as social and spatial distances are no longer homologous.¹⁰ It is the degree of access to these communication networks that constitutes the cultural and economic “capital” on which people’s social and economic welfare depends, and it is mobility, in its various modalities, which constitutes the “glue” that holds these networks together. From the perspective of Actor-Network theory space-adjusting technologies “link distant actors … [and] … make them present to one another.”¹¹ However, we must attend to Latour’s own caution in this matter, when he observes that “when the term ‘network’ was first introduced … it clearly meant a series of transformations, translations, transductions … With the new popularization of the word ‘network’, it now means transport without deformation and instantaneous, unmediated access to every piece of information. That is exactly the opposite of what we meant.”¹²

Topological space is defined by its internal structure of networked connections, independently of their position in material space. In this relational space, the key issue is to identify the vectors, or pathways created by communication infrastructures and their hierarchical patterns of interlinkage, that define the directionality and structure the content of the “space of flows.” This topological perspective disregards absolute distances in favor of mapping the links, nodes, and patterns of communicative connexity rather than physical contiguity. These networks can be quite counterintuitive in terms of geographical shape. Thus, two “hub” airports with a plethora of good connections can be considered as “near” to each other even if they are far apart in geographical distance and the modes of connectivity are complex. As Paul Adams notes, “ideas travel the 8000 miles from the UK to Australia more easily than the 100 miles from New Guinea to Australia, because of a backcloth of shared elements – linguistic, religious, political and economic traits” that tie Australia to the United Kingdom much more strongly than to New Guinea.¹³

The Ideology of Networks: Deterritorialization?

However, we must recognize that ideologies of “networking” are by no means a new phenomenon. The “cult of the network” has a very long history, and as Armand Mattelart insists, the “communication network is an eternal promise, symbolising a world that is better because it is united” – one which has been revived with each succeeding technological generation in the past, from the railroad to the Internet today. To this extent, the utopian fantasies invested in what he calls “technological idealistic determinism” constitute the basis of a “redemptive” ideology of communication which long preexisted that articulated by today’s prophets of the information society.¹⁴ While the new virtual dimensions of our world are of considerable consequence, material geography, far from being “dead,” still requires our close attention.¹⁵ In particular, emerging critical work has begun to argue that cyberspace itself has a perfectly identifiable geography, in which its routes and locations largely replicate the structure and patterns of earlier modes of communication.

In debates about the supposed deterritorialization of the contemporary world, one of developments that is often cited as an example of the death of geography is the growth of “offshore” telephone call centers, which are designed to handle the customer service functions of many Euro-American businesses in distant territories. In these call centers a Third World cyber proletariat participates at the bottom end of the global economy, doing the banal forms of keyboard-based, routine “drudgery” necessary for the upkeep of businesses and institutions in the rich West. Taking on American or European names and accents at the workplace, learning another culture (just as they have learnt the necessary skills of software) while themselves living in the physical conditions of Bombay or Bangalore, they simultaneously inhabit very different virtual and actual worlds. However, these call centers are by no means “outside geography”: indeed, their locations are perfectly explicable in terms of the history of imperialism and colonialism – whereby the imperial power bequeaths to its ex-colony the particular combination of low wage costs along with highly developed linguistic abilities in the colonial language – which is why British call centers tend to be in India while French and Spanish ones tend to be in North Africa. In this context they might perhaps be better understood as being *reterritorialized*.

Beyond the question of the emplacement of economic activity, we should also recall that Internet technologies were initially deemed to be most significant for their capacity to enable deceptions and dissimulations of various sorts, liberating identity not only from place but also from embodiment. However, we now see a growing tendency for cyber networks to draw much more explicitly on geographically based connections and on participants’ actual, rather than pretended identities. To this extent, locative media, which are highly place-sensitive, are now widely seen as central to the future profitability of

“social media.”¹⁶ Likewise, in the business world, the principal function of e-mail is often that of intensifying communications between people who are already geographically contiguous.

Material geographies thus retain significance in a variety of ways, even under changing technological conditions, and we must attend to exactly how and where such transformations are occurring. Once we look at matters in this more historically and geographically nuanced way, we discover that, rather than proceeding abruptly from one “era” of communications to another, we find a number of continuities, overlaps, and modes of symbiosis between old and new technologies of symbolic and material communications, and this means that the kind of periodization of mobility systems as developed by John Urry, discussed earlier in Chapter 3, has to be treated with considerable caution. In this shifting landscape of differentiated forms of virtual and actual connectivities, the effectivity of even the latest technologies still depends, ultimately, on material infrastructures from previous eras. Perhaps a good example of the latter would be the moment in early 2008 when the Internet was disabled across much of Australasia because the undersea cable carrying it, which still runs along the route of the nineteenth-century telegraph line laid by the British Empire, from the Mediterranean across the Indian Ocean, was damaged by the keel of a ship in the harbor at Alexandria, near the mouth of the Suez Canal – itself once known as the communications “windpipe” of the British Empire.¹⁷

Liquid Geographies

Much recent work has focused on the capacities of the teletechnologies of our age to transcend distance,¹⁸ and likewise on the ways in which networks and digitalized forms of convergent media and information flows have created a new ephemeral or “liquid” geography premised on the use of communicative technologies by people who are themselves on the move.¹⁹ However, it would be foolish to imagine that these topological forms of connection have entirely replaced the physical geography of conventional geopolitical space, making us now entirely placeless.

As Ken Hillis has put it, the challenge is to “link together the material locatedness of servers, users and actual places with the virtuality of cyberspace and the virtual components of everyday life.”²⁰ In a similar spirit, Latour articulates the issue with his characteristic pithiness:

The expansion of digitality has enormously increased the material dimension of networks ... [but] ... the more digital, the *less* virtual, and the *more* material a given activity becomes. Nowadays everyone knows that there is no GPS without satellites; no collective games without fast

connections; no drones in Pakistan without headquarters in Tampa, Florida ... Go tell Google engineers that their vast arrays of servers are just virtual!" (my emphasis – D.M.)²¹

Indeed, It has been calculated that the global storage and transport of data now uses 50 percent more energy than does the world aviation industry.²² The rhetorics of cyberspace have produced hyperbolic images of "unlimited power through disembodied mobility," in Karen Caplan's phrase, which promise a "boundless space of unfettered mobility and speedy transfers." However, as she points out, these new technologies "are themselves as embedded in material relations as any other practice."²³ For one striking example of this contradictory entanglement of the virtual and the material realms, we might turn to Ursula Biemann's analysis of the position of the Mexican women working in deregulated transnational trading zones such as Ciudad-Juarez on the US border. There, under exploitative conditions, these women work in a high-tech slum, live in shacks without running water or electricity, and earn only extremely low wages for producing the digital technologies on which all this "unfettered mobility" depends.²⁴

Here, we can also turn to Andrew Blum's work on the vast, energy-consuming, effluent producing, industrial structures of the "data farms" and communication/storage hubs on which the Internet itself depends. Blum is critical of the preferred image of the Internet as a "sort of nebulous electronic solar system of cosmic cloud,"²⁵ insisting on the net's underlying physicality as a set of places which even have their own distinctive smell – the "odd distinctive mix of industrial-strength air conditioners and the ozone released by capacitors."²⁶ As he remarks, "for all the breathless talk of the supreme placelessness of our new digital age ... the networks of the Internet are as fixed in real physical places as any railroad or telephone system."²⁷ Decisions on where to site Internet facilities are routinely made on the basis of their geographical advantages – such as New York and New Jersey's ready access to the transatlantic undersea cables that constitute the "gateway to Europe" from the United States. Conversely, because of their location on a relatively isolated peninsula, no Spanish city is ever likely to become a major Internet hub. To that extent, as Blum wryly observes, "geography is [still] destiny ... even on the Internet."²⁸ Not only does the Internet have a hard physical infrastructure but, as Marcus Krisetya notes, it is an extraordinarily concentrated one, geographically. At its simplest, that structure is "based upon a core of meshed connectivity between ... Silicon Valley, New York and Washington, DC; London, Paris, Amsterdam and Frankfurt; Tokyo and Seoul."²⁹ Indeed, the geographical sites of Internet activity are now heavily concentrated in particular places. The re-engineering of the Internet topology that has been implemented in recent years has, as Anthony Townsend notes, simply been the culmination of "the long-term trend away from the idealised distributed network envisaged in the 1960s,

towards greater centralisation of its structure.” The simple fact is that the smaller parts of any hub-and-spoke system find it hard to survive the ongoing push toward global consolidation into centralized structures, which are, in the end, more efficient and more profitable.³⁰

To return to traditional models of geography, there are also many cases in which topography still shapes transportation routes, which normally follow the path of least “friction” – on land, going through valleys and mountain passes and, on water, following the most easily navigable channels. These factors also account for the historical continuities observable in many cases, where more recent transport routes often follow the same physical paths as those established in earlier times.³¹ Thus, in the United Kingdom, telecommunications companies have laid “their competing optical fibre networks along the railway lines (Mercury), along the tops of electricity pylons (Energis) and even along the banks of the old canals that were the main transport networks during the Industrial Revolution.”³²

The development of cities can, in some cases, be directly explained by reference to the way in which their location in topographical space has, historically, given them a vital transport function. In exactly this way, the development of Chicago in the late nineteenth century, as the hub linking, via canal and railways, the agricultural output of the American Midwest to the markets of the East Coast, and onwards to Europe, laid the physical foundations that were later transposed into the city’s current position as a strategic communications and transport hub, both nationally and internationally.³³

As networks of physical movement and transport grow together, the physical hub cities of our times also become informational nodes in a global network, displaying “mutually reinforcing loops which further concentrate transport and telecommunication investments” and old infrastructures provide the material basis for the extension of new digital worlds.³⁴

However, absolute geographical position is no guarantee of permanent status, as the significance of any one location may be transformed by events elsewhere. The ports of the Mediterranean flourished during the classical period and the Middle Ages, when that sea was understood as the heart of the Western world. However, the discovery of the Americas transformed the position of the Mediterranean, so that it became, for a considerable time, a backwater. It was only later that the opening of the Suez Canal, linking the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, reestablished its importance in world trade. Conversely, contemporary rates of increase in TransPacific trade are reducing the relative significance of the Mediterranean (and indeed, now the Atlantic) once again.³⁵ Today, just as the ports of the Mediterranean declined in significance with the discovery of new territories and new sea trade routes, the relatively central position of European airports is undermined by developments in the Middle East: Dubai may well soon supplant London as the world aviation capital.³⁶

Infrastructures, Discourses, and Materialities

While new technologies continually enable new forms of communication across distance – such as teleconferencing – thus far, they have tended to function as additions to, rather than replacement for, previous mobilities. As John Adams notes, historically, the most physically mobile societies are also the heaviest users of all forms of telecommunications.³⁷ Similarly, John Thackara observes that, “in the same way that roads built to relieve congestion have increased total traffic, the Internet has increased physical transport intensity in the economy as a whole.”³⁸

Rather than telecommunications substituting for physical transport, it seems that “overall, transport and telecommunications actually feed off and fuel, more than simply substitute for each other,” as Graham and Marvin put it. Thus, such substitution as there is of routine physical interactions by telecoms is “overridden by new demands for mobility, and the spiralling use of both telecoms and physical transport, emails and face to face meetings” means that, contrary to earlier predictions, virtual communications have not substituted themselves for physical mobility to any significant extent.³⁹

If the history of mobility has to be understood as involving a whole panoply of infrastructural changes such as “the introduction of the elevator [lift], the electrification of the railway system, the introduction of the automobile as a private means of transport, the spread of air traffic and the invention of the refrigerated shipping container” today, the “forms of mechanically proximate space are now overlaid by electromagnetic forms of proximity, and the physical grid of the city’s transit routes [is] overlaid by the information network.”⁴⁰ We now see an increasing convergence and interdependence between physical transport and the symbolic (and often electronic) forms of communication of messages, information, and images.⁴¹ In this respect, Jeremy Packer claims that “as modes of transportation have increased their speed, they have become increasingly dependent upon communications apparatuses – as the production of greater mobility … runs … along the path of communications-aided safety.”⁴² As Andreas Wittel’s ethnography of network society indicates, for the “aeromobile elite” in the “fast lane” of contemporary life, if their networking involves physical transport – in the form of cars, trains, buses, airplanes, taxis, and hotels – that travel has itself “to be integrated closely with systems of symbolic communications, involving phones, faxes, answering machines, voice-mail, video conferencing, e-mail and chat rooms.” As we have seen in Chapter 4, access to the full range of these prosthetic resources is now necessary for successful participation as a full citizen of the network society.⁴³

Two examples, from rather different historical and cultural contexts, will perhaps suffice to illustrate the ways in which the realms of the virtual and the actual (along with the symbolic and the material) are increasingly, intertwined. In his analysis of the airport as an institution, Peter Adey suggests that we

should see the relation between the virtual and the material as one of “recombinant reworking of [material] space through software and electronic infrastructures.”⁴⁴ In this context, Adey stresses the fact that the virtual dimension of an airport (represented by things such as the coding of its security or air traffic control systems) is no merely ephemeral matter but also has profound material effects. As Dodge and Kitchin note, “a security alert closes a physical section of an airport; a system crash closes a check-in desk; a failure in a plane’s computer-system grounds an aircraft.”⁴⁵ The realms of the online and the off-line have to be understood as mutually constitutive.

However, it is not only in such an emblematically “modern” space as the airport that we need to understand the symbiosis of the virtual and the actual. Material and symbolic mobilities have long been intertwined – for instance, in the case of trade routes. If we take the historic “Silk Road” along which so much material was transported backwards and forwards between Europe and the “Middle” and “Far” Easts, it was not only commodities that were mobile but also discourses. As Marina Warner has argued, in relation to the role of trade in spreading the stories of the Arabian Nights throughout the Middle East, “in the Souks and Hans of Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus, tales and gossip were traded every bit as ardently as spices and silks – the stories were a crucial part of the trading system through which they moved.”⁴⁶ On Warner’s analysis then, the Silk Road itself had a crucial, virtual dimension, even if that particular mode of virtuality involved neither electricity nor digitalization. Similarly, in the contemporary context, it has rightly been argued that the City of London is best understood as “a global node of circulating stories” that are a key part of how the city maintains its central position in the electronic space of global flows.⁴⁷

Net Geography: Digital Districts

Despite the revolution in transport and communications technologies, all economic activity is grounded in specific locations “both physical[ly], in the form of sunk costs and less tangib[ly] in the form of localized social relationships.”⁴⁸ One of the key factors here concerns “agglomeration” economies – which follow from the cost benefits achieved when a cluster of businesses of a similar type are able to make shared use of common infrastructures and services. It remains the case, as Storper and Venables argue, that the physical clustering of services still brings substantial benefits “from face-to-face contact and quick exchange of knowledge … [by means of] … the dense activity connections made possible by pedestrian movement and … courier services.”⁴⁹ Oddly enough, the cyber industries themselves, which are commonly thought to be about the *deterritorialization* of communications, actually tend to cluster in very particular places – thus demonstrating the continuing significance of physical location as a form of competitive economic advantage.⁵⁰

In opposition to the widespread tendency to decouple sociality in its virtual form from locality and to what Katherine Hayles has called the metanarrative of the “disembodied post-human,” Jenny Cool offers a rich ethnography of the development of one particularly important San Francisco-based networked community called CyberOrganic, in order to “put back into the picture the flesh which continues to be erased in contemporary discussions about cybernetic subjects.”⁵¹ This group was extremely influential in the development of the Web during the 1990s, and among other achievements, was responsible for bringing *Wired* magazine online and initiating many other Internet enterprises, such as “Craig’s List.” All of these projects were run by the members of a group of around 30 people who lived in shared households in the same area in San Francisco, participated in regular “potlatch” collective meals, and shared a LAN (Local Area Network), involving their ongoing collective presence on a “chat”/conferencing system called “the space bar”⁵²

In line with previous work on the crucial role of place in technical innovation and dynamic economic growth of Silicon Valley, Cool demonstrates how CyberOrganic emerged from the same local context as earlier projects such as the WELL (the Whole Earth ’Lectronic Link, launched in 1985) and its own (hippie) forerunner, the Whole Earth Catalogue. In tracing the development of the project and the ways in which the forms of online and face-to-face sociality were involved in close symbiosis, she shows how “the intermediation of online and onground [offline] can work to consolidate and extend, rather than attenuate, affiliations based on place and embodiment” in the social construction of networked media.⁵³ This, she argues is not least because of the formative role of physical place and the embodied face-to-face sociality that this co-location affords, so that the project was able to combine “the trust and identity building power of face-to-face fora with the flexibility and greater reach of computer mediated communication.” In this, context, the “real space for members to meet and interact formed a flesh and blood ‘back channel’ to its community building efforts in cyberspace” and the ongoing “chat”/conference function provided by the “space-bar” facility effectively automated the phatic function of maintaining ongoing connection between members via the LAN whenever they were physically separated.⁵⁴ At the same time, the co-location of members established a high level of trust that could then be augmented and maintained at a distance, in the extended and reconfigured form of their networked sociality.⁵⁵

Moreover, it was not only in those early days that geographical place was crucial to the development of these technologies. A very similar account is given by Andrew Blum of the social role of physical copresence in the development of the business clusters of talent, expertise, and money in subdistricts of Silicon Valley such as Merlo Park and Paolo Alto. At the later point, when initiatives such as Facebook were taking off, Blum notes, speaking of the cafes where the key deals were done, that the networking was an “unabashedly physical process” – just as it has been, in more recent times, in Tokyo’s Otemachi

district, in London's Docklands, and in the cafes around "Silicon Roundabout" in East London, the new hub of Internet start-ups.⁵⁶

These are geographically identifiable – and often highly compact – areas of a given city, comparable to the CyberSentier district in Paris or the Liberties-Coombes area of Dublin, which, during the boom years of the 1990s, was the site for a major urban regeneration project generating large numbers of high-value jobs precisely on the basis of its providing its tenants with a particularly high density not only of Internet and telephone connections but also of face-to-face networking opportunities. In the same way, while the global financial system may have become borderless, it is by no means placeless but is characterized by hybrid constellations that bring together a set of potentially "placeless" electronic networks in their actual, "place-determined" territorially bound insertions in particular geographical locations.⁵⁷

Network Structures and Hierarchies

While some early commentators argued that the World Wide Web was developing an "essentially" democratic and evenly distributed presence, many now recognize that the Web increasingly displays the same type of hierarchy as the conventional media industries insofar as a very small number of powerful nodes (Facebook, Microsoft, CNN, BBC, Google, Amazon, etc.) each possess a very large number of links and thus come to dominate the topology of the web.⁵⁸ Moreover, the dominance of these "main connectors" seems to be increasing over time, with the connections between them growing stronger, just like those between the main hubs of the financial world.⁵⁹ Thus we see an emerging tendency for the Web to develop in the manner of what have been called "aristocratic" systems, whereby the central nodes (having already acquired power in a previous historical era) find ways to "remediate" their pre-existing cultural capital into the terms of a succeeding technology.⁶⁰

At a macro level, as a result of the economic dynamics of the "preferential diffusion" process, the communication hubs that are already well connected offer more profitable opportunities than those which are less so, and thus they constitute the backbone of the contemporary world communication system. Thus the basic hierarchical pattern still displays a topology of connection organized through hubs and peripheries. Even though it is often now claimed that ours is an era of "rhizomatic" connectivity, in which everywhere is today equally accessible from any other point on the planet, it is quite wrong to imagine that "old-fashioned" concepts of centers of imperial power no longer pertain. Although any particular center may fade in importance, while newly-formed others gain greater power as "attractors," nonetheless centers as such remain crucial, as key nodes in the networks through which "objects, emotions, cultures and people circulate."⁶¹

If the space between the “world cities” of the northern hemisphere can be said to be shrinking, then conversely, at the same time, the space between already marginalized locations within the poor South is, in many cases, now widening. To take the case of air traffic, the dominant intercontinental flows principally link the major cities within Europe, North America, and the Asia Pacific region on an East–West axis across the rich north of the globe. To that extent, “major world airline routes serve a largely white, or at least pale skinned, market on the North America–Europe–Far East axis.”⁶² Moreover, if we turn to the realm of virtual communications the principal circuit of East–West communications across the rich north is complemented by the parallel flow of Internet traffic through the exactly the same set of key world cities – London/New York/Tokyo.⁶³ On this axis, London still serves as the central hub (although is under increasing competition from Amsterdam) connecting to New York and Chicago to the west, and Tokyo, Singapore, and Hong Kong to the east. The latter serve as regional hubs for the relatively minor flows of north–south traffic into Latin America, Africa (which, despite its vast population, still accounts for under 3 percent of world international air traffic), and Australasia. Thus, in relation to the poor south, the international transport network is still largely shaped by the history of imperialism and colonialism.⁶⁴

Against Globalized Models: Regional and National Specificities

In the light of these considerations, rather than think about cyberspace in the abstract, as some unitary sphere, we might be better advised to investigate the specific ways in which the virtual is integrated with the actual in different material cultures and contexts. Here, we should recall that in his discussion of the putative placelessness of the contemporary world, the anthropologist Mark Auge famously identified the airport as one of the emblematic “non-places” of the modern era.⁶⁵ However, to now return to my earlier discussion of Amsterdam’s Schipol airport, Tim Cresswell is rightly critical of the way in which theories of the Network Society present the “space of flows” as if these existed in purely technological forms, outside of any particular historical or sociological context. His analysis of the particularities of Schipol demonstrates clearly that, far from being a “non-place” indistinguishable from any other airport, it has been inflected by its particular sociopolitical context and history, which permeates all the networks that pass through it, thus while it “may be a node in a global space of flows, it is still uniquely Schiphol.”⁶⁶ Even if transport systems, worldwide, share certain structural features, we have to recognize their cultural distinctiveness.

The question here is how to avoid the trap of such “totalizing” logics, so as to produce nuanced analyses of the specific significance of new technologies as they are integrated into people’s lives. If we are to understand better how local particularities emerge out of global processes, this requires not more generalizations about the “essential nature” of cyberspace but what Terry Flew has referred to as a “new empirics” in Internet studies, which investigates how particular technologies are deployed in different contexts.⁶⁷ In a similar spirit, Jayne Rogers and Lucien Strate both insist on understanding cyberspace itself as a multilayered and plural structure of technosocial and technospatial interactions and engagements involving the intersection of millions of online and off-line spaces.⁶⁸ The issue, then, is “what kinds of multiplicities … will be constructed” depending on how particular technologies are embedded and integrated into specific everyday locales.⁶⁹

Here we also need to consider how the specific characteristics of the virtual sphere are articulated with particular national and language cultures. Thus, while some features of the Internet, such as pornography, gambling, and spam, have a more or less universal status, they are always recontextualized by cultural differences. Even in the era of the Internet, most aspects of “global culture” still exist in nationally varied inflections. Thus Cornell Sandvoss rightly notes that, although fan culture is generally associated with globalized forms of interpersonal communication, nonetheless, just as the television market, worldwide, is still mainly national in form, so are the fan cultures that have grown up around its television programs, even if they are now mediated by the Internet.⁷⁰ Here, we also see an interesting example of the intertwined relations of old and new media. As Sandvoss notes,⁷¹ rather than thinking only about how the Internet has transformed fan cultures, we must also consider how the preexisting off-line forms of fan culture continue to shape the development of both television and the Internet. In this connection, it is also worth remembering that, just as the majority of television consumption continues to flow within, rather than across, national boundaries, so too does much Internet traffic.⁷² Similarly, the patterning of Facebook “friendships” is, on the whole, resolutely national in shape, and such transnational links as exist are largely explicable as a result of historical and/or linguistic bilateral connections between particular nations.

The Limits of Geographical Metaphors

At this point we need to return to the metaphors of mobility with which I began Chapter 1. Perhaps, in recognition of the fact that geography is “too important to be left to geographers,” as David Harvey has claimed, the field of media and communications has, in recent years, imported a range of spatial and geographical metaphors (e.g., position, displacement, site, field, territory, domain soil, horizon, region, landscape, cartography).⁷³ Many are invoked rather loosely and have come to constitute an unexamined new mantra for the

“spatialization” of analysis of communications processes. Of course, as Inka Salovaara-Moring observes, it is often by the importation of metaphors and analogies from other intellectual fields that new paradigms can be developed in interdisciplinary work.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, as Orvar Lofgren remarks in this connection (invoking Bateson), “we do sometimes get carried away by certain metaphors … and it is important to know when to abandon them.”⁷⁵

To take a case in point, as Richard Ek observes, Virilio’s vision of the emergence of a “culture of generalized interactivity, based on ubiquitous and pervasive Telematic grids” where there is “no more here or there … only the hallucinatory utopia of communication technologies”⁷⁶ provides a useful provocation to thought, it overstates the general case. Rather than Virilio’s abstract “dromology” of speed as a generalized aspect of contemporary culture,⁷⁷ we need an analysis of the stratification of access to different modes of “connexity.” As against the much-trumpeted role of new technologies in allowing the transcendence of social, geographical, and cultural divisions, our inquiries should also be concerned with how new divisions are continually reinscribed in technical modalities.⁷⁸ To declare the total obsolescence of traditional conceptualizations of material space and place in favor of an ontology entirely based on concepts of network and flow is unhelpful if we seek to understand the changing and variable forms of their coexistence. Thus, while Virilio usefully alerts us to the way in which changes in the form and speed of transportation (especially in the shift from organic to mechanical to informational speeds) play a role in shaping the extent of a given territory (and thus its characteristic modes of organization), we need to develop a perspective that is more historically grounded and less inclined to technological determinism.

As Lofgren argues, in much recent discussion there has perhaps been too much emphasis on the prefixes “post” (as in *postnational*, or *postlocal*) and “de” (as in *decentred*, or *deterritorialized*) and not enough careful attention paid to the precise relations of moving bodies and media flows in specific circumstances – nor to the social, cultural, political, and material limitations that still impose themselves in these processes. As he rightly notes, there remains a “complex micro-physics” of “being there” at a certain geographical place, as well as in media space⁷⁹ that, rather than being capable of being understood in the abstract (as if, for instance, cyberspace was a placeless medium located everywhere and nowhere) requires concrete empirical study investigating the precise relationship between the inhabitation of material and mediated spaces in particular cases.⁸⁰

Notes

1 D. MacKinnon, G. Pirie, and M. Gather (2008) *Transport and Economic Development*, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies: Mobilities, Flows and Spaces*, Blackwell.

- 2 P. Adams (2009) *Geographies of Media and Communication*, Wiley Blackwell pp. 48–49.
- 3 Adams, *Geographies of Media*, p. 79; T. Haagerstrand (1973) The Domain of Human Geography, in R.J. Chorley (ed.), *Directions in Geography*, Methuen.
- 4 D. Janelle (1973) Measuring Human Extensibility in a Shrinking World, *Journal of Geography* 72 (5); M.P. Kwan (2000) Human Extensibility and Individual Hybrid-Accessibility in Space-Time, in D. Janelle and D. Hodge (eds.), *Information, Place and Cyberspace*, Springer Verlag; see also P. Virilio (2000) The Last Vehicle, in *Polar Inertia*, Sage.
- 5 S. Graham (1998) The End of Geography? *Progress in Human Geography* 22 (2), 182.
- 6 M. Dodge and R. Kitchin (2001) *Mapping Cyberspace*, Routledge, p. 24.
- 7 M. Serres and B. Latour (1995) *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, University of Michigan Press, p. 105.
- 8 On this, see also R. Ek (2006) Media Studies, Geographical Imaginations and Relational Spaces, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom, pp. 51–52.
- 9 Cf. M. Castells (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell.
- 10 J. Urry (2007) *Mobilities*, Polity Press, pp. 192–193.
- 11 M. Callon and J. Law (2004) Guest Editorial, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22, 6.
- 12 B. Latour (1999) On Recalling ANT, in J. Law and J. Hassard (eds.), *Actor Network Theory and After*, Blackwell, p.15.
- 13 Adams, *Geographies of Media*, p. 79; Or to take a different example of the disjunction of topology from topography, 60% of all Fedex mail, regardless of where it is sent from or to, passes through their main sorting hub in Memphis, Tennessee.
- 14 A. Mattelart (2000) *Networking the World*, University of Minnesota Press, p. viii; A. Mattelart (1996) *The Invention of Communication*, University of Minnesota Press, xvii.
- 15 K. Hannam, M. Sheller, and J. Urry (2006) Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings, *Mobilities* 1 (1); Urry, *Mobilities*.
- 16 I will return to the question of locative media, in more detail, in Chapter 6.
- 17 Marine life also exerts its effects: throughout 2015 there were repeated incidents of undersea Internet cables across Southeast Asia being disrupted by sharks attacking them, having been disturbed by the electromagnetic fields they generate – personal correspondence, Abigail Carter, 2015.
- 18 J. Derrida and B. Steigler (2002) *Echographies of Television*, Polity Press.
- 19 Cf. Z. Bauman (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press.
- 20 K. Hillis quoted in R. Shields (2006) *The Virtual*, Routledge, pp. 76–77.
- 21 B. Latour (2011) Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor Network Theorist, *International Journal of Communication* 5, 802.
- 22 R. Cook (2015) The World's Cleverest Man, *The Observer New Review* (March 8).

23 K. Caplan (2003) Technologies of Mobility and Location, in S. Ahmed, C. Castaneda, M. Fortier, and M. Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Re-groundings*, Berg, p. 210.

24 U. Biemann (2010) Making the Transnational Intelligible, in *Mission Reports: Artistic Practices in the Field/Video Works 1998–2008*, Bildmuseet/Arnolfini Gallery.

25 A. Blum (2012) *Tubes: Behind the Scenes at the Internet*, Viking, p. 6.

26 Blum, *Tubes*, p. 44 – or what Robert Harris describes as “the familiar electrical scent of burnt dust” (R. Harris (2014) *The Fear Index*, Random House p. 204).

27 Blum, *Tubes*, p. 9.

28 Blum, *Tubes*, pp. 64, 113.

29 M. Krisetya (1999) *Hubs and Spokes: a Tele-Geography Internet Reader*, TeleGeography Consultancy quoted in Blum, *Tubes*, p. 27.

30 A. Townsend quoted in Blum, *Tubes*, p. 65.

31 J.-P. Rodrigue, C. Comtois, and B. Slack (2006) *The Geography of Transport Systems*, Routledge.

32 S. Graham and S. Marvin (1996) *Telecommunications and the City*, Routledge, p. 329.

33 D. MacKinnon, Pirie, and Mather, Transport and Economic Development. For a magisterial account of the significance of historical “inertia” of transport and communications linkages, see F. Braudel (1978) *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism*, John Hopkins Press, p. 197.

34 Graham and Marvin, *Telecommunications and the City*, p. 329.

35 Rodrigue, Comtois, and Slack, *Geography of Transport Systems*, pp. 135, 150.

36 Cf. S. Calder (2012) The Gulf Widens, *Independent Traveller* (September 8).

37 J. Adams (2000) Hypermobility, *Prospect* (March), p. 30.

38 J. Thackara (2011) ‘The Gram Junkies’ in A. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im)mobility*, NAI Publishers/SKOR, p. 125.

39 S. Graham and S. Marvin (1998) *Net Effects*, Comedia/Demos, p. 12.

40 A. Hoete (2004) Editorial Introduction, in *A Reader on Aesthetics of Mobility*, Black Dog Publishing, pp. 10–12.

41 Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, Editorial, 4, 11.

42 J. Packer (2006) Rethinking Dependency, in J. Packer and C. Robertson (eds.), *Thinking with James Carey*, Peter Lang, pp. 79, 95, 87.

43 A. Wittel quoted in Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, Editorial, 12.

44 P. Adey (2006) If Mobility is Everything Then It Is Nothing, *Mobilities* 1 (1), 80.

45 M. Dodge and R. Kitchin quoted in Adey, If Mobility is Everything, p. 80.

46 M. Warner (2011) *The Secrets of the Arabian Nights*, BBC Radio 4. Transcript (April 21). In this connection, Bruce Chatwin’s analysis ((1987) *The Songlines*, Jonathan Cape) of how the “virtual maps” of Australian Aboriginal cultures are produced by discourses that literally “sing” a territory/pathway into existence is of much broader significance than simply representing some exotic cultural practice among “primitive” peoples. I offer here two examples,

distinct but linked, of First World versions of this same practice. The first comes from the moment in the 1970s when the hippie entrepreneur Tony Elliott invented the magazine *Time Out* as a way of constituting a “counter-public” for London’s then newly emerging cultural resources. It was, at least in part, the creation of this marketing discourse that interpellated and constituted the audiences that then made these various entertainment and cultural activities financially viable. The second concerns the way in which, ever since the 1980s, cities all over the world have developed cultural industry strategies as a form of “place-making” designed to enhance the public image of their city and thus attract inward investment, enhance tourism, strengthen their local economy, and create jobs. In both examples, the virtual discourses of promotion and publicity do not simply represent preexisting material realities – rather, they play an important part in bringing them into existence.

- 47 N. Thrift (1996) *Spatial Formations*, Sage, p. 252.
- 48 P. Dicken (1988) *Global Shift*, Sage 1988, p. 11.
- 49 M. Storper and A. Venables (2004) Buzz: Face-to-Face Contact and the Urban Economy, *Journal of Economic Geography* 4, 351–371.
- 50 Cf. Graham and Marvin, *Net Effects*; M.E. Porter (2004) *Competitive Advantage*, Free Press; M. Aaltola (2005) *Power Hub Geography* quoted in Urry, *Mobilities*, 154.
- 51 K. Hayles (2005) *My Mother Was a Computer*, Chicago University Press, p. 5.
- 52 J. Cool (2010) Co-location, Phatic Communion and Presence-Casting: The Mutuality of Online and On Ground in the Social Construction of Networked Social Media. Paper posted to Medianthro@easaonline.org (May 4). On the sociological background to this influential prototechnical “scene” in San Francisco, see also F. Turner (2006) *From Counter-Culture to Cybersculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Catalogue and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, University of Chicago Press.
- 53 Cool, Co-location, p. 1.
- 54 Cool, Co-location, pp. 7–8.
- 55 Cf. Turner, *From Counter-Culture* for an exposition of the hippie roots of Silicon Valley. See more recently, Carole Cadwallader’s journalistic account of how property prices in certain districts of San Francisco are being pushed to breaking point as the entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley increasingly seek to “recentre” into the city itself: C. Cadwallader (2015) Of Course it’s a Bubble ..., *Observer Review* (November 4).
- 56 See Blum *Tubes*, pp. 70–71.
- 57 Cf. E. Kluitenberg (2011) Extreme Displacement, in Seijdel, *(Im)mobility*, pp. 13, 14. In the case of the high-tech start-ups which are the motor of innovation in new technology, the need for physical contiguity between participants is all the more pronounced. In part, this is for the simple reason that those involved have to make complex (and ultimately intuitive) judgements about who they wish to get involved in working with and tend to feel the need for more than virtual contact, in order to take this decision – and work opportunities largely depend

on “being there” – hanging out in just the right cafes, in order to hear about the best projects while they are still in development. Likewise, potential investors are effectively being asked to put very large sums of money into unproven projects, with no demonstrable profitability as yet, designed by very young entrepreneurs who, precisely because of their age, have little or no track-record. In this situation, investors tend to feel the need for face-to-face contact with those in whose potential they are being asked to invest.

58 Cf. G. Buchanan (2002) *Nexus, Small Worlds*, Morton, pp. 84–85; cf. also N. Fenton, J. Curran, and D. Freedman (2012) *Misunderstanding the Internet*, Routledge; E. Mozorov (2012) *The Net Delusion*, Penguin.

59 Urry, *Mobilities*, 215.

60 Moreover, the ongoing historical process of time–space convergence generally tends to reinforce previous social, economic, or political hierarchies, rather than flattening them out. To take an example from an earlier period, the arrival of the telephone mainly served to give further advantage to those already privileged persons who could afford this new teletechnology with its powers enabling them to talk at a distance.

61 V. Bajc, S. Coleman, and J. Eade (2007) Mobility and Centring in Pilgrimage, *Mobilities* 2 (3), 321.

62 L. Naa Nørle Lokko (2002) Elsewhere, Perhaps, in D. Blamey (ed.), *Here, There, Elsewhere*, Open Editions, p. 227.

63 Cf. Blum *Tubes*.

64 B. Graham and A. Goetz (2008) Global Air Transport, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies: Mobilities, Flows and Spaces*, Blackwell, pp. 138–139, 154.

At a national level, the same kind of hierarchically centralized structure is replicated in other transport systems. Thus, the advanced rail systems in France, like those now planned for the United Kingdom, are increasingly dedicated to high-speed trains serving only a limited number of access points along their routes. Evidently, given their high investment costs, such systems operate at their optimum efficiency between the centers of large densely populated cities but are of limited value to those living elsewhere, who often find their own access to the rail network decreasing.

65 M. Auge (1995) *Non-Places: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso.

66 T. Cresswell (2006) quoted in A. Kellerman (2008) International Airports, *Mobilities* 3 (1), 171.

67 T. Flew (2001) The New Empirics in Internet Studies, in H. Brown, G. Lovink, H. Merrick, *et al.* (eds.), *Politics of a Digital Present*, Fibreculture Publications.

68 J. Rogers (2004) Doreen Massey: Space, Relations, Communications, *Information, Communication and Society* 7 (2), 273–291; L. Strate (1999) The Varieties of Cyberspace, *Western Journal of Communications* 63 (3), 382–412.

69 D. Massey quoted in A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.) (2011) *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space*, Peter Lang. p. 3.

70 C. Sandvoss (2011) Fans Online, in A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.), *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space*, Peter Lang.

71 Sandvoss, Fans Online.

72 Cf. K. Hafez (2007) *The Myth of Media Globalisation*, Polity Press.

73 D. Harvey (1984) On the History and Present Condition of Geography, *The Professional Geographer* 36 (1), 7.

74 Cf. I. Salovaara-Moring (2006) Fortress Europe, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom, p. 111.

75 O. Lofgren (2006) Taking Place, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom, p. 299; G. Bateson (1973) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Paladin; cf. also G. Lakoff (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press; for R.B. Kitaj quoting I.A. Richards on the limits of analogies, see R.B. Kitaj (2013) *Paintings and Drawings (exhibition catalogue)*, Pallant Art Gallery, Chichester.

76 Ek, Media Studies, p. 55; cf. K. Mackenzie Wark's earlier claims in K. Mackenzie Wark (1994) *Virtual Geography*, Bloomington Indiana University Press.

77 P. Virilio (1986) *Speed and Politics*, Semiotext(e).

78 Cf. A. Barry (2001) *Political Machines*, Athlone Press on "techno-zones."

79 Lofgren, Taking Place, pp. 305, 299.

80 Cf. Jenny Sundén's discussion of the "dialectical relation" between online and off-line places in her chapter, "Digital Geographies" in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.) (2006) *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom. These cultural differences are often visibly inscribed in their varying architecture and design traditions. This may take the form of the early modernism of Frank Pick's integrated design for the whole London transport system, the architectural grandeur of the Moscow metro, or the gay decorations of the trams in an Australian seaside city (G. Votolato (2007) *Transport Design*, Reaktion Books, pp. 60–61), all of which help to constitute the public image – and experience – of that particular place. Although his nostalgic comments are now both anachronistic and factually outdated, by some historical distance, nonetheless Paul Theroux's comments on the national specificity of railway systems as the "key" index of local culture makes for an interesting comparison here: "The trains in any country contain [its] essential paraphernalia ... Thai trains have the shower jar with the glazed Dragon on its side, Ceylonese [i.e., Sri Lankan] ones the car reserved for Buddhist monks, Indian ones a vegetarian kitchen and six classes, Iranian ones prayer mats, Malaysian ones a noodle stall, Vietnamese ones bullet-proof glass on the locomotive, and on every carriage of a Russian train there is a samovar. The Railway Bazaar, with its gadgets and passengers represented society so completely that to board it was to be challenged by the national character." P. Theroux (1975) *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Hamish Hamilton, p. 209.

6

The Virtual and the Actual

Being There, Disembodiment, and Deterritorialization

Being There: Questions of Place

The questions of “virtuality,” disembodiment, and deterritorialization, which preoccupy media debates focused on contemporary forms of computer-mediated electronic communication, can be better understood if they are linked back to earlier debates occasioned by the rise of broadcasting. In that context, Joshua Meyrowitz argued that we no longer live just “in” one place, but simultaneously inhabit a range of virtual “elsewheres.”¹ In that earlier debate, Paddy Scannell argued that one of the fundamental things that broadcasting allows is the “doubling” of place as we inhabit other realms (geographically or socially distant or fictional)² while “safe at home.”³ His approach to the “banalization” of this newly configured communicational space, in which broadcasting is seen to supplement the physical realm of sociality, offers a useful gloss on Meyrowitz’s thesis. Of course, nowadays, the domestic living space is no longer simply “doubled” by the presence of the television screen but refracted in ever more complex ways by the simultaneous presences of the screens of the laptop or tablet computer, as well as that of the smart phone. Thus, many people now engage simultaneously in all these communicative modalities, being as (if not more) likely to communicate about the program they are watching on television with virtual others via any of numerous social media sites, as they are to talk about it with those present in the room. Indeed, given the variety of virtual elsewheres that now make themselves present to us in our own homes, we might perhaps be said to live be living in the realm of the “technological (or telematic) uncanny.”⁴

The impossibility of maintaining a clear distinction between place (in a purely geographical sense) and mediated experience was posed at the turn of the millennium by Margaret Morse, who noted how often we experience the copresence of multiple worlds as we travel materially through physical locations while being virtually involved in a variety of screen “elsewheres.”⁵

Similarly, for many of us, nowadays, teletechnologies such as the mobile phone “embed the virtual in the physical and weave it seamlessly into daily urban life.”⁶ If place now persists, while simultaneously being mediated by the whole apparatus of teletechnology, the question is to what extent mobile practices necessarily transform the conception of place as a “proper, stable and distinct location.”⁷

If we are to escape the “boosterist” language of cyberhype, which pictures a dematerialized and disembodied virtual realm unfettered by the constraints of physics, geography, or bodily flesh, then we must reject the misconception that cyberspace exists independently of geographical space. In this respect, Rowan Wilken rightly questions the wisdom of setting up a dichotomy between the virtual and the actual as entirely distinct realms,⁸ rather than seeing them as, overlapping and intertwined or, in McKenzie Wark’s terms “criss-crossed with information flows, which increasingly overlay material geographies.”⁹

Epistemological and Ontological Questions: Stability and Motion

A range of disabling presumptions are, unfortunately, built into the terminology in which we conventionally distinguish the virtual from the actual. In particular, we need to problematize the idea of the virtual realm as not only mobile but ephemeral – as compared to the physical realm of the actual, which is often treated in a reified manner, as if it were entirely stable. The conventional assumption that physical structures are more stable than signifying practices does not always apply. Thus, we must note the seeming anomaly that, if we take the legal system as an example, there are many laws that last longer than the buildings in which they were written. Indeed, not all buildings are intended to last a long time, and in “boom” eras, new-build property on prime sites is often designed to amortize itself (and be replaced) over a very short period. In some cases, the virtual realm is, counterintuitively, more stable than the material. Similarly, in the realm of transport, in many countries, standards for railway line gauge-widths have outlasted a number of particular generations of locomotion.¹⁰ Likewise, in the realm of finance, the institution of the British pound has readily survived its physical transformation from a piece of paper to a metal coin, although the dynamics of politico-legal discourses with the European Union will perhaps, one day, dictate its demise. In general terms, as Hannam, Sheller, and Urry argue, “contemporary science no longer sees anything as static, fixed and given – even apparently fixed entities have to be understood as themselves comprised of movement” (if at a slow, or even subliminal rate), and they note that “there is no structure separate from process.”¹¹ Even physical landscapes themselves have to be understood as being in continuous, if subliminal, movement.¹² Similarly, while it might be useful to consider a physical structure

such as an airport in terms of its obduracy (the persistence of certain physical structures and elements), it would be inaccurate to say that the airport is immobile. Rather, as Peter Adey suggests, we should see it as a structure that, while only changing slowly, is nonetheless in almost continuous movement. As he notes, “airports are always on the move, with endless accretions, extensions and new runways, re-themings and make-overs.”¹³

Here we can also usefully follow Parks and Starosielski when, drawing upon Actor-Network Theory, they observe that we need to rethink the ontology of infrastructures so that, rather than thinking of them as stable and given, we regard them as “performative forces that evolve dynamically,” featuring infrastructural breakdowns and continually requiring acts of repair that should be thought of as a normal (rather than merely “exceptional”) part of their existence, insofar as they must be continually reproduced through social practices.¹⁴

The Virtual, the Material, the Actual and the Real

If we are to understand the complexities of how the virtually augmented spaces of our lives are now embedded within the material practices and settings of everyday life, the terminology is of some consequence. Rather than counterposing the virtual to the real, Paul Virilio observes that the distinction is perhaps better posed as one between the virtual and the actual, insofar as the virtual (as the realm of the “potential”) is simply the antithesis of the latter rather than of reality itself.¹⁵ Once the matter is framed that way, we are better able to recognize the distinction between the immaterial and material worlds without exclusively reserving the status of the “real” to the latter, and we can understand these realms as constituting different modalities of the real.

The equation of the real with that which is materially present and empirically observable in the immediate environment might seem to be no more than common sense, and as Rob Shields notes, “everyday talk … equates the real with concreteness, material embodiment [and] tangible presence” and the virtual with “absence, unreality or non-existence.”¹⁶ However, we may be much better served by a more flexible conceptual framework that recognizes the different dimensions in which the real can exist. In particular, we need to recognize the virtual as a specific ontological mode – which is none the less real for not taking material, concrete, or embodied form.¹⁷ Increasingly, the material copresence of others is complemented by the (technologically enabled) virtual copresence of people and institutions (and a wide range of other causal agents) that also have real and profound effects on our lives while operating from a distance.

Further, we are mistaken if we equate the realm of the virtual with the particular digital technologies with which it is now so much associated, as it is important to place it in historical perspective.¹⁸ There is a long history of earlier virtual worlds (and liminal spaces) that anticipated the role of today’s

digital technologies in making present the realms of both the imaginary and the spiritual. Thus, one important historical example of a type of virtual environment that “tricked the mind and body into feeling transported elsewhere” is to be found in the spectacularized *trompe-l’oeil* modes of interior decoration of churches, which were specifically designed to manifest the virtual presence of angels and other beings.¹⁹ If, in earlier times, as Shields observes, the realm of the virtual – not least, in its spiritual forms – was more accepted as an important dimension of the real, the rise of computer-mediated forms of digital communication now returns the virtual to its previous historical position of greater centrality in contemporary “Western” cultures, after a period of marginalization.²⁰ Indeed, the whole history of the development of communications systems can be seen as a sequence of developments of techniques for making material absences virtually present across a growing distance – from the early days of courier (and later postal) systems through the development of the telegraph, the telephone, the telex, the fax, and the Internet.

Virtual presences have long taken the forms of memories, ghosts, apparitions, and angels, and there are parallels between the status of these ancient phenomena and that of long-distance migrants in the modern era. Until very recently, people who had migrated to far-off destinations could be said to have only continued to exist (for their relatives left behind) in a relatively “insubstantial” or virtual form (thus, in practical terms, not being so very much more “real” to their relatives than the angels of an earlier period).²¹ Insofar as they were so distant, they were unable to participate in the ongoing daily lives of their families. However, today, the situation is transformed to the extent that long-distance forms of communication now enable migrants to maintain ongoing “virtual presences” in multiple locations. I will return to this issue later in this chapter, in relation to what Deidre Boden and Harvey Molotch call the “compulsions of proximity.”²² These questions are further explored in the work of Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller on the role of virtual technologies in “electronic parenting,” on which I will focus in my discussion of migrancy in Chapter 8.²³

Questions of Mediation

In addressing these issues, it is important to recognize that there is no such thing as “unmediated” communication – for even face-to-face interaction has always been mediated by language. Moreover, “there has never been a time when the circulation of the information was confined to face-to-face contact ... [nor] any time [when] technology ‘arrived’ within a culture to displace some original and authentic mode of communication,” and we would do well to avoid any “metaphysics of tidy distinctions” in this respect.²⁴ As Umberto Eco has argued, far from it being the case that we only live in a world of virtuality as a

consequence of our entry to the digital world, one of the most fundamental capacities of language itself is the capacity to represent the virtual presence not only of those who are bodily absent – but also of imaginary, fictional, abstract, collective, mythological, or historical entities.²⁵ Furthermore, insofar as it is via technical forms of mediation that we frequently have a sense of being in two places at once, it is worth remembering that this experience has long been seen as central to the development of modernity. Thus, Ford Madox Ford noted in the early twentieth century that “it is the nature of modern life for one to be in one place with one’s mind in another.”²⁶ Ultimately, the issue is one of how to understand the changing ways in which virtual and actual modes of communication are integrated in the lives of people in particular circumstances, and as Rowan Wilken notes, how to historicize these emerging technologies as part of a long series of sociotechnological innovations, adaptations, and inventions.²⁷

Disembodiment and Representation

It is now well established that earlier, idealist visions of the substitution of a pure, clean, and limitless realm of virtuality for the material space of place and embodiment were little more than fantasies. In the case of gender, Lisbet Van Zoonen offers a substantial critique of the early cyberfeminist hopes that the disembodiment and anonymity of the Internet would undermine dichotomous gendered discourses.²⁸ In some versions of this discourse, the Internet was even envisaged as an “essentially” feminine space of cooperation and networking.²⁹ However, in effect, few of these hopes proved justified, and nowadays, Internet usage and gender performances, by and large, still take place within the limits of dominant heterosexual gender discourses. In more general terms, as Nancy Beym reported some time ago, “participants in virtual communities do not, on the whole, disguise cues of gender or race, and their online personae are usually consistent with their off-line presentations of their selves.”³⁰ Similarly, Nina Wakeford’s work on the Internet cafe as a “translation landscape” in which the virtual and physical environments meet demonstrates very clearly that, far from having liberated people from embodiment, traditional images and experiences of gender still persist in most Internet fora.³¹ As Van Zoonen notes “the off-line binary, sexed body remains crucial for the disembodied online performance of gender,” and, to this extent, early cyberfeminist optimism simply failed to pay sufficient attention to how sociocultural contexts would determine the effectivity of new technologies.³²

Questions of actuality and embodiment are closely intertwined with matters of virtuality and representation. Furthermore, the factors governing the distribution of types of persons in geographical space closely parallel those governing the distribution of representations in the “virtual spaces” of the media.³³ To take the case of ethnicity, in his discussion of the cinematic representation of

London's Chinese community in the 1920s, Jon Burrows points to the significance given to control over their virtual as much as their geographical presence in the United Kingdom. The Chinese being associated with drug-taking in the East End, contemporary anxieties about the "Yellow Peril" "contaminating" the whole capital concerned the distribution of images of "sordid scenes" manifested in films such as *Cocaine* and *Broken Blossoms*.³⁴ The fear was that these filmic representations of drug-taking would bring the evils of that geographical locality, to which few visitors would physically go, into far too close a virtual proximity to the rest of the country. Even in its virtual form, this was seen as a potentially dangerous transgression of cultural boundaries, which the British Board of Film Censors was concerned to police as they felt that it was only by enforcing a strict quarantine around the images of drug-taking in these films that the actual spread of the habit in the geographical territory of London could be contained.

Net Geography and Locative Media

If virtual technologies enjoyed their initial successes by enabling people to make connections across vast physical distances, interest has subsequently moved towards their role in local, place-based modes of connectivity, and as noted in the Chapter 6, recent years have seen a boom in place-sensitive media. These media allow users to create a profile mapped to their own postcode or enter into discussions (and subsequently face-to-face interaction) with people in their own physical location. Here, the online network closely mirrors the structure of the off-line, physical world and functions as a "connective tissue" enabling those in a given locality, with shared interests, to find each other more readily. Nowadays, the "profiles" on which patterns of interaction are set up are often exclusive to a particular street, area, or postcode, with the specific purpose of enlivening local community activity. Evidently, this turning back towards physical/geographical place signals a very different conception from the initial vision of cyberspace as a boundless space of disembodied placelessness. Thus, Juan Martin Prada suggests that it might now be possible to speak of a "geospatial web 2.0," based on a geographically localized collective memory and made up of many different types of applications, involving spatialized information and geographic data.³⁵ In support of this argument, he refers to phenomena such as the rise of "place-blogging," focused on events and news on people in a particular neighborhood, and the development of geo-browsers mobilizing information generated by co-located Web users.³⁶

In the wake of anxieties surrounding the decline of "social capital" in contemporary North America, Keith Hampton and Barry Wellman³⁷ were concerned to empirically investigate the basis for the widespread fear that virtual modes of communication would lead to the atrophy of community life.³⁸

However, in their investigation of the particular “wired suburb” that they called “Netville” (near Toronto) they found that, far from there having been negative effects on face-to-face social interactions, “wired” residents were in fact also *more* connected in the off-line world. In this respect their findings in relation to the Net replicated those of Levy in an earlier period in relation to the telephone – which indicated that those who made the most phone calls were also those who ordinarily interacted with the largest number of people face-to-face.³⁹ Hampton’s study found that, as compared with their non-wired fellow residents, “wired” people physically recognized “three times as many of their neighbors, talked to those neighbors twice as often, visited with them 50 percent more often, made four times as many local phone calls and further boosted their local communication with neighbors through the use of e-mail.”⁴⁰ Thus, it transpired that, rather than necessarily isolating people in their homes, being “wired” can contribute positively to the maintenance of local social ties, both online and off-line. These findings also return us to the banal, but fundamental, insight from “uses and gratifications theory” that the use of any technology will be influenced by, among other things, the psychological characteristics of the individuals concerned. To imagine that the new media’s “effects” simply override all such factors would be to ignore much that we already know about generations of users of different media technologies: they are most unlikely to be immune to the same, banal, psychosocial determinations that have influenced the media usages of people of previous ages.

Locative media services are now well-established commercially, and people are increasingly used to the idea that “territorialized” information comes to them “where they are,” in the form of SatNav, Google maps, GPS, and Geo-tagging applications on their mobile devices. Sometimes this might take the form of location-based information for which they have signed up that is delivered to their phones when triggered by their arrival at a particular place. At other times it might be a “buddy-tracking” system used to alert people to the presence of “friends” in their location. More sinisterly, it can take the form of “geographically contextualized advertising” or “locative spam,” in which we are bombarded with information from local shops posting glowing comments about themselves disguised as user-generated content.⁴¹ Thus, it is not only individual members of communities who are making use of computer-based media for local purposes but also commercial companies. Here we must also recognize the increasing importance of geo-demographic systems of consumer classification that classify places by reference to the types of persons who (predominantly) inhabit them.⁴² Residential and other personal data are then cross-correlated to produce predictive systems of consumer behavior based on these “lifestyle clusters” in which data spaces and physical spaces are increasingly enmeshed in a process informed by geo-demographic analysis and codified by spatial mapping.⁴³ Here we see the role of locative media in surveillance because nowadays “location sensors tell where we are, what we are looking at

and how fast we are moving," and everyone in the world casts an "information shadow" that can be captured and processed for all manner of purposes. Thus, many interactive technologies simultaneously function as modes of "actuarial surveillance," which, as Tim Reilly explains, involves the "systematic, analytic, methodical creation of normativity," which, as a technique of knowledge production, renders us visible and functions as a form of population management.⁴⁴

To address the issue of normativity further, it is also worth noting that the rise of mediated forms of social networking (through technologies such as Facebook) has also led to a situation where anyone who avoids involvement in them can now be regarded as eccentric, if not pathologically abnormal. Thus, media discussions of the cases of two mass murderers in 2012 seized on the fact that neither man participated in such social network media, describing them as "online ghosts," and suggested that their withdrawal from these "normalized" activities could, in fact, usefully be read as an indexical sign of their pathological natures.⁴⁵ At a more banal level, in April 2015 the British travel press reported a series of incidents in which people without a sufficiently well-developed social media presence had been deemed not to qualify to book accommodation via online systems: to that extent, having a credible Web-profile thus becomes a necessary qualification for effective citizenship.

Virtual Trust and the "Compulsions of Proximity"

Ultimately, the anxieties concerning the potential substitutability of virtual for copresent interactions that set the agenda for Hampton and Wellman's research, discussed earlier, concern the potential fraying of the mechanisms for the generation and maintenance of social trust. As both Francis Fukuyama and Stig Hjarvard note, "trust" is a crucial factor in sustaining the functioning not only of market networks but of social life itself, because living in a state of distrust reduces the capacity to act with confidence in any situation.⁴⁶ In this respect, as Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin argue, "today's uncertain ... economies make trust, constant innovation and reciprocity more and more important ... [and trust] ... can only be fully forged through ongoing face-to-face contact, which thus becomes more important as reflexivity becomes built into economic conduct."⁴⁷ In the disembedded realm of globalized culture, various commercial strategies have been developed to attempt to induce virtual forms of trust – including most notably "branding."⁴⁸ Thus, companies from CNN to Virgin attempt to inculcate a sense of trust in their global brand – but such trust necessarily exists only in relatively weak and conditional forms compared to that generated in situations of face-to-face interaction.⁴⁹

In analyzing issues such as these attempts to generate trust in relation to the new media, older historical perspectives, such as Elihu Katz and Paul

Lazarsfeld's "two-step flow" model, in fact, still apply.⁵⁰ The questions they raised about issues of credibility in the process in which trusted "gatekeepers" relay media messages to broader communities, and in so doing effectively vouch for their credibility, apply equally in the realms of the new forms of virtual/networked communication.⁵¹ So far as Facebook goes, the fact that in such a network one is, by definition, only receiving information from friends (of different degrees), provides a good example of the ways in which technologies penetrate social networks through existing structures of trust. Conversely, in early 2011, Silvio Berlusconi attempted to use Twitter feeds to mobilize support in the Italian elections. However, in that case, he did it by "cold-calling" people who were not already part of his network; the vast majority reacted negatively to being approached in this way, and so his strategy backfired badly.

Reflexivity and Misunderstanding: Thick and Thin Modalities of Interaction

In examining processes of communication, one key consideration concerns the relative inefficiency of virtual interaction in its more limited ability to simultaneously function self-reflexively in monitoring instances of misunderstanding, or meta-communicative failure. Physical copresence allows for by far the richest and most multidimensional form of interaction and is "thick" with information, in that as those who are copresent have the great advantage of being able to contextualize any one element of communication by reference to a large number of other contextual factors – all of which is essential to communicative reflexivity. Thus, the interpretation of a spoken word might be informed by reference to the tone in which it was spoken, the expression on the face of the speaker, their eye movements, bodily posture or gestures, etc. In such interaction, any ordinarily skilled participant routinely deploys a wide variety of contextual clues to interpret what are often ambiguous verbal statements – so as to "read between the lines" of what is being said. Conversely, when copresent conversation is transmuted into the form of a telephone conversation, a written letter, or a typed e-mail, each "thinning" of the communicative medium strips away more and more context and thus allows for more and more potential misunderstanding.⁵²

Clearly, the more closely a medium can replicate the full sensorial input of face-to-face interaction, the nearer it comes to achieving the "thickness" of the communicational data available to participants in such a situation. However, while Skype and video-conferencing come closer to such replication than previous technologies, even they are limited, not least by virtue of the restrictions of vision imposed by the available camera angles. These technologies also impose an unnatural formality in conversational "turn-taking" as result of the delays in sound transmission (which make it hard to distinguish between when

a speaker has finished talking and when they are merely pausing for breath or hesitating in their thoughts). All of these factors tend to seriously hamper the fluidity of conversational flow, and the more so, the greater the number of participants, especially given the importance of a shared understanding of the rules of turn-taking.⁵³

By the same token, the thinner the medium of communication, the greater the possibility for deception (it is far more difficult to detect a lie in a text message or an e-mail than in a phone conversation; and it is more difficult in any of these media than it is in copresent interaction). It is for these reasons, as Boden found in her research with international stockbrokers, that face-to-face meetings between participants were deemed to be necessary at key moments, to “set up” the transaction process and establish trust; on the basis of these meetings, subsequent routine interactions, utilizing “thinner” media could then proceed.⁵⁴ However, it is often still necessary for further face-to-face meetings to be held to clarify such misunderstandings as may occur during the subsequent course of disembedded forms of mediated communication. Such meetings require the sensitivities of each speaker to be fully tuned (in real time) to those of the others if the misunderstanding is not to be exacerbated. Thus, in most cases, bad news is generally best broken face to face if a bad situation is not to be made worse. Of course, in some situations, clarity is not necessarily a virtue and fully explicit statements may well, in fact, be counterproductive if all participants are to save face. So the nuanced (and, at times, deliberately ambiguous) conveyance of implicit understandings facilitated by face-to-face interaction may well be much more appropriate as a communicative strategy.

Conversely, given how hard it is to read questions of tone in e-mail communications, it is hardly surprising that communicative networks that depend entirely on this method of interaction tend to be dysfunctional at moments of difficulty.⁵⁵ At such moments, of course, it is now well established that what everybody needs, is to “get together” physically and have a meeting in order to try and reestablish effective channels of communication.

Communication is not reducible to instrumental functionality. Thus, the seemingly irrelevant “small talk” before the start of a meeting often plays a crucial role in cueing interactants in how others are feeling and what positions they are likely to take in any ensuing discussion. Similarly, the informal banter that often follows such a meeting allows participants to indicate to each other (with the requisite degrees of opacity and/or subtlety) how they have understood what has occurred. For these reasons, John Urry argues that copresent interaction remains the primordial mode of sociality and that intermittent face-to-face interaction is still central to networking within virtual spaces. The aspect of activity that cannot be substituted by virtual forms is precisely the informal interactions that occur in the interstices of a formal meeting. These intermittent, copresent, informal encounters function as feedback mechanisms that

reinforce the distinctions between those who are and are not able to be physically present, to the further disadvantage of the “network-poor.”⁵⁶

The question of the “substitutability” of virtual for face-to-face communications is thrown into sharp relief if we consider the “limit case” of those with physical disabilities. Jennifer Light demonstrates how, in the United States, virtual technologies are sometimes now offered as what she calls “technological Band-Aids,” as a cheaper alternative to improving physical access to particular locations (e.g., workspaces, educational buildings). She recognizes the benefits that some of these technologies can offer to the disabled but also indicates how, increasingly, “champions of telecommuting promote it as a cost-saving alternative to office redesign or accessible transportation.” As she notes, restricting the disabled to only virtual forms of access to key facilities risks consolidating their disadvantage as “second-class” citizens.⁵⁷ and her argument also supports the general case that virtuality itself can only confer second class forms of interaction and/or citizenship.

Communications: Hierarchies of Preference and Modes of Symbiosis

Within any given network, elite members will rely more on face-to-face copresent interaction than will others, precisely because of the strategic importance of their interactions and the lower tolerance that can be allowed for misunderstandings in them.⁵⁸ Similarly, ordinary participants in any communications network will tend to use face-to-face interaction for their own most important interactions because this allows them to establish the terms within which subsequent routine interactions can then be conducted by means of “thinner” media: thus, in the business world, video-conferencing is now often described as “a perfect second-meeting tool, after the first handshake.”⁵⁹ The same distinction applies in the case of long-distance friendship networks: while often routinely conducted by e-mail or social media, they still usually depend for their sustenance on “occasional” rituals of face-to-face interaction.

It might perhaps be objected that Boden and Molotch’s presumption of the superiority of face-to-face over technologically mediated forms of interaction should be read as simply being generationally specific, especially if we think of the converse preference that many young people have in favor of text-messaging or e-mail over face-to-face communication. Certainly, contemporary media are replete with representations of generationally specific behavior, in this respect.⁶⁰

Thus Hari Kunzru’s novel *Transmission* depicts a workplace scene where “everyone left their phones on voicemail and most wore headsets while they worked, creating a private sonic space that was, according to custom, violated only in an emergency. Interaction was via e-mail, even if the participants occupied neighbouring cubicles. This made sense to ... [them] ... Personal space is

valuable. The ability to prioritise one's communications is valuable. Interrupting someone to talk to them is a way of pushing your query to the top of their stack. It overwrites someone's access controls and objectively lessens their functionality, which was as close to an engineering definition of rudeness as he felt he was ever likely to come.⁶¹ This, however, is no merely fictional phenomenon. On a visit to Taiwan in 2008 I came across a household containing three teenage boys, who preferred to communicate with each other via their computers, even when they were in the house at the same time. Similarly, in the "Otaku" cultures of Japan, some young people (usually boys) retreat to their rooms for long periods and only communicate via a computer keyboard, preferring a home-bound introverted lifestyle of chatting with their friends online to face-to-face interaction.⁶²

Here we might want to distinguish between a generational difference in familiarity (or competence) with different technologies and the demonstrable superiority of different forms of communication for particular purposes. Thus, it could still be argued that the habitual preference of some young people for social media over face-to-face forms of interaction is, in some respects, dysfunctional (their own preferences notwithstanding). Nonetheless, just as Urry is careful to acknowledge the continuing importance of copresent interaction as the fundamental/primordial mode of sociality, we must acknowledge that in a "networked" society a "metaphysics of presence"⁶³ focused primarily on face-to-face interactions among geographically proximate communities can hardly be adequate. Ultimately, Urry suggests, these dichotomies need to be transcended, so that we recognize how "human agency and social networks are ... [now] ... complexly interwoven with mobile phones, e-mail and the means of corporeal movement" and "co-present and distant communications increasingly intermingle".⁶⁴

Certainly, these technologies work in complex and unpredictable ways, in different circumstances. Thus Rasha Abdulla⁶⁵ writes of how reassuring it was, both for her and her parents, that when she moved from Egypt to study in America they could nonetheless be in daily contact by e-mail. Her remarks about how, in some ways, her parents felt closer to her when they were in such regular e-mail contact than when she was physically in Cairo resonated very strongly with remarks of a similar type made to me by one of my own overseas students who said that, to her surprise, once she got to the United Kingdom, she found that she and her mother were much more intimate in their conversations via e-mail than they ever had been when they physically lived together. To recognize all this does not involve abandoning a critically evaluative framework in relation to any given technology, but it argues for a more pragmatic approach that avoids any idealized view of "authentic" face-to-face interaction. From this perspective, the mediated exchange of text messages between geographically distant spouses at bedtime might perhaps better be seen, pragmatically, as one minor, useful element in a repertoire of communicative practices rather than some kind of existential debasement of the "essence" of marital relations.⁶⁶

Teleparenting: A Test Case of Long-Distance Relationship Maintenance

Commentators such as Virilio would claim that in a world of telepresence, being “close” is less a measure of geographical distance and more a question of whether the mediation operates in “real time.”⁶⁷ From my own point of view, rather than positing such a radical transformation, in which geographical distance is, in effect, obliterated, it seems more useful to consider how these different modes of communicational experience are layered on top of each other. Quite apart from anything else, the forms of proximity available via telepresence do not always work as smoothly as Virilio imagines. In exploring these issues, we can usefully refer to the anthropological work of Danny Miller and Mirca Madianou, mentioned earlier, which explores how transnational, multisite households repurpose a variety of communications teletechnologies for their own ends.⁶⁸ They take a pragmatic view of the extent to which electronic forms of communication are substitutable for physical presence, as women migrants who leave their children for long periods in the care of grandparents “back home” use e-mail, Webcam, and Facebook to try and invent forms of “virtual parenting.”⁶⁹ In their ethnographic work, we can see cases where the “real time” proximity achievable via telepresence creates profound psychic crises. In one case, just as her daughter’s birthday cake was about to be cut at the party back home, the distantly viewing mother switched the camera off, as the virtual form of proximity allowed by the technology simply served to emphasize the geographical distance by which she was absent.⁷⁰ While accepting that the ideal of “direct communication” between physically copresent subjects is a metaphysical illusion, insofar as even those interactions are mediated by language (as I noted earlier), one can still argue that electronically transmitted parental messages can never be totally satisfactory substitutes for “being there.”⁷¹ Minimally, we might conclude, particular relationships require specific modes of presence on different occasions. These are issues to which I will return at the end of Chapter 8, in my further discussion of the particularly important functions of mobile communication systems for migrants.

Notes

- 1 J. Meyrowitz (1986) *No Sense of Place*, Oxford University Press.
- 2 P. Scannel (1996) *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Blackwell, p. 172.
- 3 S. Moores (2012) *Media, Place and Mobility*, Palgrave.
- 4 Cf. S. McQuire (1997) The Uncanny Home, in P. Droege (ed.), *Intelligent Environments* Elsevier Science; P. Tabor (1998) Striking Home: The Telematic Assault on Identity, in J. Hill (ed.), *Occupying Architecture*, Routledge.

- 5 M. Morse (1990) An Ontology of Everyday Distraction, in P. Mellencamp (ed.), *The Logics of Television*, Indiana University Press, p. 195; cf. also A. Friedberg (2002) Urban Mobility and Cinematic Visuality, *Journal of Visual Culture* 1 (2).
- 6 W.J.T. Mitchell (2005) *Placing Words: Symbols, Space and the City*, MIT Press, p. 182.
- 7 Morse, *Ontology of Everyday Distraction*.
- 8 R. Wilken (2010) *Teletechnologies, Place and Community*, Routledge.
- 9 M. Wark (1994) Third Nature, *Cultural Studies* 8 (1), 120.
- 10 Indeed, these gauges themselves were often derived from those used in building the wagons for prerailway tram services, which, in turn, derived from those used in building the wagons previously drawn by horses.
- 11 K. Hannam, M. Sheller, and J. Urry (2006) Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings, *Mobilities* 1 (1), 10.
- 12 D. Massey (2005) *For Space*, Sage.
- 13 P. Adey (2006) If Mobility is Everything, Then There is Nothing, *Mobilities* 1 (1), 81–82. Indeed, the architect of Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, Jan Beecham, explicitly described his vision of it as a place that is "always being rebuilt, as it is continually adapted to new purposes" (T. Cresswell (2006) *On the Move*, Routledge, p. 232). To argue thus is to see this physical structure itself as a kind of "continuous event." As Dejan Sudjic notes, continual building work occurs at all airports, and thus "discovering the original Heathrow buildings, under the continuous succession of accretions, extensions, adaptations and demolitions [would be] a task for an archaeologist" (D. Sudjic quoted in Adey, If Mobility is Everything, pp. 80–81).
- 14 L. Parks and N. Starosielski (eds.) Introduction, in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, University of Illinois Press, pp. 9, 13, 12.
- 15 P. Virilio quoted in John Armitage (ed.) (2001) *Virilio Live*, Sage, p. 146.
- 16 R. Shields (2003) *The Virtual*, Routledge, p. 19.
- 17 Shields, *Virtual*, pp. 46, 206.
- 18 Cf. G. Murdock and M. Pickering (2009) The Birth of Distance, in M. Bailey (ed.), *Narrating Media History*, Routledge, pp. 171–183.
- 19 Shields, *Virtual*, p. 11
- 20 Shields, *Virtual*, pp. 37, 38. As Margaret Wertheim has noted, there are strong analogies between the Christian image of heaven as an idealized realm beyond the chaos of the material world and contemporary visions of cyberspace "as a place where the self will be freed from the limitations of physical embodiment": M. Wertheim (1997) The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace, in N. Elin (ed.), *Architecture of Fear*, Princeton Architectural Press, p. 296. Pressing the analogy further, Michel Serres compares the function of the satellites and electromagnetic waves that populate the contemporary skies with the celestial angels of earlier eras, so far as they share the crucial function of transmitting important information (M. Serres quoted in P. Adey (2010) *Mobility*, Routledge, p. 197).
- 21 Cf. my later discussion, in Chapter 8, of the photographer Vanley Burke's childhood puzzlement as to where his relatives who had migrated from Jamaica had "gone to."

22 C.D. Boden and H.L. Molotch, (1994) The Compulsions of Proximity, in B. Boden and R. Friedland (eds.), *NowHere*, Routledge.

23 M. Madianou and D. Miller (2012) *Migration and New Media*, Routledge.

24 N. Lucy (2004) *A Derrida Dictionary*, Blackwell, pp. 142, 154. For a critical review of these debates, see D. Deacon and J. Stanyer (2014) Mediatisation: Key Concept or Conceptual Bandwagon? *Media, Culture and Society* 36 (7), 1032–1044. For their origins, see A. Hepp (2009) Differentiation, Mediatisation and Cultural Change, in K. Lundby (ed.), *Mediatisation*, Peter Lang; N. Couldry (2008) Mediatisation or Mediation, *New Media and Society* 10 (3).

25 U. Eco on language as a semiotic system for invoking absent entities – see his (1978) *A Theory of Semiotics*, Open University Press.

26 Ford Madox Ford quoted in *The Man Who Was Ford Madox Ford*, BBC2 transcript (September 1, 2012).

27 R. Wilken, *Teletechnologies*; cf. also S. Zielinski (1999) *Audiovisions*, Amsterdam University Press. Here Jacques Derrida and Bernard Steigler offer the terms “actuvirtuality” or “artifactuality” as a way of attempting to transcend the binaries that structure how we think of these ways of being as opposites. This conceptual move also functions to recognize the extent to which our experience of the present is itself constructed; cf. Lucy, *Derrida Dictionary*.

28 L. Van Zoonen (2011) The Rise and Fall of Online Feminism, in A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.), *Online Territories: Globalisation, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, Peter Lang.

29 Cf. S. Plant (1997) *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women of the New Techno-Culture*, Fourth Estate.

30 N. Beym (1998) The Emergence of On-line Community, in S. Jones (ed.), *CyberSociety 2.0*, Sage.

31 N. Wakeford (2003) The Embedding of Local Culture in Global Communications Independent Internet Cafes in London, *New Media and Society* 5 (3), 379–399; cf. L. Kendall (2002) *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub*, University of California Press.

32 Van Zoonen, Rise and Fall, p. 136

33 D. Morley (2000) *Home Territories*, Routledge.

34 Cf. J. Burrows (2009) A Vague Chinese Quarter Elsewhere: Limehouse in the Cinema 1914–36, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 6 (2) (August), 281–301.

35 J.M. Prada (2009) The Emergence of the Geospatial Web, posted at Medianthro@easaonline.org (January 21).

36 Cf. also E. Gordon and A. de Souza Silva (2011) *Net Locality – Why location Matters in a Networked World*, Wiley Blackwell. These tendencies perhaps reach their epitome in emerging practices of collective action such as “Flash mobs” enabling the time-synchronized congregation of persons in a particular place.

37 K. Hampton and B. Wellman (2002) The Not So Global Village of Netville, in B. Wellman and C. Haythornwaite (eds.), *The Internet in Everyday Life*, Blackwell.

38 Cf. R. Putnam (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon and Schuster.

39 P. Levy (1998) *Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital Age*, PlenumTrade Books, p. 32.

40 K. Hampton (2002) "Netville: Urban Place and Cyberspace," Department of Urban Studies and Planning MIT unpublished paper, p. 5.

41 Cf. R. Fitzgerald (2006) Tell Me When I Get There, *The Guardian* (November 23).

42 E.g., ACORN/CACI in the United Kingdom.

43 D. Phillips (2011) Identity and Surveillance Play in Hybrid Space in A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.), *Online Territories: Globalisation, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, Peter Lang.

44 Tim Reilly quoted in O. Burkeman (2011) Reality Check, *The Guardian* (March 15), G2.

45 C. Bennett (2012) Not on Facebook? What kind of Sad Sicko Are You? *The Observer* (August 12), p. 35. These murderers were James Holmes in the United States and Anders Behring Breivik in Norway.

46 Cf. S. Hjarvard (2000) Mediated Encounters: The Role of Communication Media in the Creation of Trust, *Global Media Cultures Working Paper No. 2*, University of Copenhagen; F. Fukuyama (1996) *Trust: the Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity*, Penguin.

47 S. Graham and S. Marvin (1998) *Net Effects*, Comedia/Demos, p. 13. See later in this chapter on "virtual" forms of trust.

48 Cf. Hjarvard, Mediated Encounters.

49 For a counterargument as to how virtual forms of trust can be developed, see John Naughton's account of the success of organizations such as Uber and eBay in establishing virtual markets based on new modes of self-reflexive (and mutual) monitoring by participants: J. Naughton (2015) How eBay Built a New World on Little More Than Trust, *Observer Review* (September 13).

50 E. Katz and P. Lazarsfeld (2006) *Personal Influence*, Transaction.

51 Cf. N. Idle and A. Nunns (2012) *Tweets from Tahrir*, OR Books, which uses this methodology to trace the twitter-flows in Cairo during the Arab Spring.

52 Cf. M. Douglas (1991) The Ideology of Home, *Social Research* 58 (1) on the necessity of copresence virtues of communicative "redundancy" at family meals, especially at symbolic occasions such as Christmas or Thanksgiving, when copresence is obligatory for all those who wish to be deemed effective members of the family group.

53 For a good discussion of the complex modalities of these rules in everyday conversational exchange, see J. Fishman (ed.) (1972) *Sociolinguistics*, Penguin.

54 Boden quoted in O. Lofgren (1996) *In Transit*, University of Lund Press, p. 12.

55 As demonstrated by the way that e-mail communication, used in isolation, so readily gives rise to dysfunctional patterns of "flaming" and/or bullying.

56 J. Urry (2007) *Mobilities*, Polity Press, pp. 232, 231.

57 J. Light (2001) Separate But Equal, *APPA Journal* 67 (3) (Summer), 273. To address a different aspect of health and wellbeing, the drive to cut the costs of all welfare services, which is central to neo-liberal market/state policies, seems likely, in the United Kingdom at least, to move towards a position where the poor will find it much harder to physically access a doctor when they are ill rather than a telephone or e-mail-based “health advice” service.

58 Boden and Molotch, *The Compulsions of Proximity*.

59 Cf. M. Weinstein, Wainhouse Research, quoted in T. Standage (2004) *Virtual Meetings – Being There*, *The Economist* (May 13).

60 Thus the “Doonesbury” cartoon strip once depicted two adolescent boys as being so wrapped up in their own e-worlds that they would text message each other across a restaurant table rather than speak. On another occasion, a young woman is shown as automatically fearing the worst when, rather than sending her a text message, her fiancé actually wants to talk to her on the telephone. For her, this implies “bad news,” exactly as the arrival of a telegram would, almost inevitably, have inspired anxiety in ordinary households in the United Kingdom in the mid-twentieth century.

61 H. Kunzru (2004) *Transmission*, Penguin, p. 57.

62 H. Azuma (2009) *Otaku: Japanese Database Animals*, University of Minnesota Press; Y. Ling (2008) *Postmodern Consumer Culture: The Rise of Otaku Economy*, University of Taichung; W. Phoenix (2006) *Plastic Culture: How Japanese Toys Conquered the World*, Kodansha International.

63 Cf. I.M. Young (1990) The Idea of Community, in L. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Routledge.

64 Urry, *Mobilities*, pp. 47, 180–181; 176–177.

65 R. Abdulla (2007) *The Internet in the Arab World*, Peter Lang.

66 For a sensitive rendering of the complexities involved here, see the work of Sherry Turkle – most recently her *Reclaiming Conversation*, Turnaround Books (2015). For an up-to-date, pragmatic approach to the pros and cons of various forms of digitally mediated communication see N.K. Baym (2015) *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, Polity Press. Her sensible pragmatism is best demonstrated in one of her closing comments in the book that “there are circumstances in which mediated interaction is preferable to face-to-face interaction, circumstances in which it is worse, and others when its interchangeable” (p. 177). I am perfectly sympathetic to her recognition of the ways in which virtual and actual forms of communication are increasingly intertwined in our everyday lives as a matter of empirical fact. Nonetheless, I feel that her (eager) anticipation of a day in the future in which it is no longer necessary (or appropriate) to distinguish between online and off-line activities mistakes a process of empirical “familiarization” (with a whole range of technologies) for a change in their ontological status. The distinction between online and off-line, or between the actual and the virtual as different modes of the real is, and will remain, a necessary analytical distinction. However much

the two categories become increasingly enmeshed experientially (or empirically), in our analyses, their differing and distinct ontological statuses will still need to be recognized.

67 Cf. J. Tomlinson (2007) *The Culture of Speed*, Sage, p. 102 et seq.

68 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and the New Media*.

69 At a personal level, a few years ago, when long-distance phone calls cost more, I employed a Zimbabwean cleaner to do some domestic work in my flat in London who confessed that she missed her children “back home” so much that, some weeks, she made very little profit from her cleaning work because she spent so much of the money she earned on telephone calls to speak to her distant children. Thus she was stuck in a Catch 22 situation, in which she had to stay away even longer in order to earn the money she needed to pay for their education in Zimbabwe.

70 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and the New Media*.

71 Cf. Young, The Idea of Community.

Part III

The Mobility of People, Information, and Commodities

Case Studies in Communications Geography



Figure 7.1 Display of luggage of late nineteenth-century immigrants to North America, Ellis Island Immigration Museum, New York 2006. *Source:* Photograph by the author.



Figure 7.2 Display of luggage and bunk beds of twentieth-century immigrants to France, Musé de la Cité Nationale de l'Immigration, Paris 2009. *Source:* Photograph by the author.

7

Migration

Changing Paradigms, Embodied Mobilities, and Material Practices

Introduction

In some of my previous work, I have addressed questions of mobility and migrancy through the prism of the processes of boundary maintenance and exclusion that function to hold communities together.¹ In so doing I have inevitably focused primarily on the experience of the “host” communities into which migrants arrive. In the very first section of this chapter I return briefly to that issue – considering the ontological disruption that migrancy represents for the relatively settled communities of the rich northwest of the globe. However, I then reverse that perspective to offer an analysis that focuses more centrally on the migrant experience itself.

Of course, one must recognize that the geography of migrancy itself is continually being transformed. To take but one example, from the European (and particularly German) point of view, Turkey has long been seen as one of the principal sources of problematic inward migration. As of Europe’s “migrant crisis” in 2015, the European Union has worked hard to shift the effective borders of Europe to the southeastern sides of the Mediterranean and, in particular, to cajole Turkey into acting as the EU’s “border guards” in keeping migrants out from what we might call the “Further East” area. In the wake of the ongoing crises in the Middle East and the destabilizing effect of Chinese growth across Eastern Asia, Turkey itself is now on the global frontline so far as migration is concerned. Indeed, in a survey in August 2015, Turkey scored higher than any other country for the percentage of its population which was anxious and fearful about continued migration into their country. All this indicates clearly that we should not reify any of the current geographical patterns of mobility but, rather, recognize their continuing fluidity.

1 Conceptualizing Migrancy

Migrancy as Ontological Disruption: Whose Perspective?

In his commentary on what he calls the “demographies of the postmodern,” Frederic Jameson writes of how the West “now has the impression that, without much warning … it … confronts a range of individual and collective subjects who were not there before” and the new visibility of these others “now compels attention in new ways.”²

In the virtual realm, the simultaneous availability of satellite TV’s imagery, in center and periphery alike, disrupts the previous logic of colonial time – in which the center was always the realm of both the (modern) present and its future, while the periphery was condemned to eternal backwardness, struggling to catch up, in the “waiting room of history.”³

Within the discipline of anthropology, Johannes Fabian has pointed to the long-established political cosmology that places the primitive not simply far away geographically, from the West, but also far away in time – in the realm of the past. Hence he raises the question of what people in the West feel is happening when its temporality is suddenly invaded by “the Time of the Other.”⁴ It is in that context that Massey understands the ontologically destabilizing nature of contemporary migrations from the margins to the center. The physical presence of migrant bodies displaying multicultural difference at the “end of the street” in the ex-imperial metropolis inevitably undermines its own sense of temporal – and cultural – centrality.⁵

In this moment, those at the metropolitan center may be shocked not simply by the arrival of people from far-away places but also by the arrival of people whom they would have imagined to “belong” in the past. A good example of this kind of ontological culture shock would be the panic created in West Germany in the wake of the country’s reunification in the early 1990s by the arrival of ethnic Germans, long consigned to exile in the Soviet bloc – “ghosts from the past,” who came back with their antiquated versions of the German language and, to those in the West, “outdated” forms of culture.⁶ In this sense, migration can perhaps be understood as an unwelcome assertion by these migrants of their previously unrecognized “coevalness” with the metropole. However, it is also important to note that such destabilizing large-scale migrations are, in fact, relatively rare: the vast majority of the world’s “marginal” poor will simply never arrive in the Western centers – because their access is severely restricted by visa controls. Of course, one would not know that from the popular media’s consistent exaggeration of the scale of the “threat” posed to host cultures by incoming migrants – as witnessed not least in the summer of 2015 (when this was being written) by the UK media’s hysterical coverage of

the (still rather small) numbers of migrants attempting to access Britain via the Channel Tunnel which made this issue “hypervisible” in political debate.

The conventional cosmology of the Western world is now potentially also destabilized by the contemporary inflow of foreign capital into the West as it, rather than the poor South, is increasingly subject to inward foreign investment. One early example of this new pattern was seen in the panic experienced in America in the early 1990s when Japanese companies bought into Hollywood, while in the contemporary period, we see the anxieties created by the West’s increasing dependence on Chinese capital investment.⁷ However, these matters are complicated: if at present, party political perspectives dictate that most countries in Europe (and elsewhere in the rich North) are concerned with controlling migration into their territories, the business world itself is all too aware that one of the foundations for success for any would-be “global city” is the presence of a diverse and multicultural workforce. From this perspective, as Hein de Hasse puts it, nothing reveals that a city is dying like a lack of foreigners, and in the future “the question may no longer be how to prevent migrants from coming, but how to attract them”⁸: at some point, the same may come to be true of foreign capital.

Assimilating, Belonging, Returning: The Case of the United Kingdom

In her analysis of the changing historical manifestations of migrancy in the United Kingdom, Gail Lewis offers a useful distinction between the migrancies associated with the older colonial form of globalization and those associated with the newer, globalized interconnections of the post-Cold War period. One key issue is how the migrancy of one period articulates with that of another. Thus, Lewis asks what happens to the migrant from a former colony now resident in the colonial metropolis when these old entanglements are “being traversed and remapped by the new cartography of global connections and inequality ... in the context of these new times of multistranded mobility and transnational flow?”⁹ In the case of the United Kingdom, many black and Asian migrants from the poorer countries that were previously part of the British Empire still wish to settle there, once they have entered. However, we now see, alongside that historically familiar pattern, a substantial increase in new forms of short-term economic migrancy, both from eastern Europe and from the old white Commonwealth. Nowadays, by no means all of those who enter as migrants wish to stay: three million people who migrated to Britain since the mid-1980s have subsequently left, and the number who spend fewer than four years in Britain has doubled in recent years.¹⁰

This situation also produces a shift in public debates concerning the relationship between the terms “race” and “immigration”: the tensions about

these issues are no longer simply those between an older white British population and black or minority ethnic (BAME) immigrants. These new migration patterns now also create tensions between the now long-settled BAME communities with direct or inherited connections to former British colonies and the more recent migrants from the “accession countries” from the east of the European Union. Those who have long fought to establish an identity for themselves as black or Asian Britons with a legitimate home in the United Kingdom, and whose families have contributed work and taxes to the establishment of the postwar Welfare State, often, understandably, feel a strong sense of entitlement as UK citizens. Moreover, they now sometimes feel resentful when scarce resources seem to be going to those who in their view are less “deserving” – such as recently arrived Polish plumbers, seasonal eastern European agricultural workers, or asylum-seekers. To take one instance, Pearline Hingston herself arrived in Britain as a child immigrant from the Caribbean in the 1960s but is now (like a number of BAME voters) a supporter of the right-wing nationalist party UKIP.¹¹

Furthermore, as noted earlier, the previously assumed “assimilationist” trajectory whereby migrants were expected to gradually dissolve their previous identities into that of their host nation is only one possibility, and the direction of intergenerational cultural orientations follows no fixed path. In any case, as Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy’s study of Turkish migrants in London shows, far from yearning for some final “assimilation” into the United Kingdom, a significant number of the older migrants among them still invest significant emotional resources and money in building a symbolic “family home” in their village of origin, intended both for holiday visits and for an envisaged “final return” – even if, in reality, it stands empty most of the time.¹² In exactly the same way, many older Caribbean migrants invest their energies and money in building a dream house “back home.” Nonetheless, in practice, few of them are able to retire there, and as Daniel Miller notes, for many, “it is only in death, interred beneath a [tombstone] … model of the perfect house, that the final return to Jamaica is successfully completed.”¹³ This itself is, of course, often considered an achievement of considerable significance: for many migrants, the prospect of being buried in the soil of a foreign graveyard, far from home, would be a matter of cultural calamity.¹⁴

In a previous era, the work of researchers such as Alec Hargreaves in France showed a generational split in which younger Arab migrants were increasingly oriented towards the media of the “host” culture while their parents (and grandparents) remained oriented to satellite channels from their countries of origin.¹⁵ However, today, in the wake of the wars in the Middle East and the panic about “Islamist” threats, in many parts of Europe we see a very different generational split within many Muslim communities, with some second and third generation migrants rejecting the Western values that their own parents have, over time adopted, in favor of fundamentalist forms of Islam – a scenario

dramatized well many years ago in Hanif Kureishi's story *My Son the Fanatic*.¹⁶ Kureishi's prescience, in that respect, was heavily dramatized by the bombing of European cities in 2015–2016 by young Islamist jihadis born and brought up in France and Belgium. This tragic turn of events showed just how far the rejection of the West has gone for many young European Muslims who now regard themselves as decisively outside (militantly opposed to) its particular cultural traditions and secular values.

Typologies and Archeologies of Migrancy

The discussion of contemporary patterns of culture and mobility is often conducted in a rather abstract form that refers (in the singular) to The Postcolonial, The Diasporic, or The Transnational "Condition." My own concern is with scrutinizing the particularities that emerge from these global processes without adopting the totalizing logic that would reduce them all to mere instances of the same phenomenon. Thus, rather than developing a theorization of "migrancy in general" – or treating it as a metaphor for the supposed essence of our age – my aim is to develop an analysis of migrancy as involving differentiated forms of material practice.¹⁷

In some recent discussions it has been suggested that migrancy has now entered a new era. If, in the postwar period, the "postcolonial" form of migration had a clear, one-way direction from the periphery to the center, the migrancy of today is seen to involve an oscillation between different spaces, neither of which constitutes a final or stable home.¹⁸ In this spirit, Robins points to the rise of "new logics of migration" in which migrants may live complex lives, developing business, familial, and social networks and instituting new forms of transcultural sociality across national borders. Here we see the growth of innovative life-worlds operating across transnational spaces in which "Chinese merchants in Hungary do business in Budapest, but may be planning to retire in the United States" while "a Turkish man living in London may do business in Hamburg while educating his children in Izmir."¹⁹ In this connection, Robins argues that, rather than presuming that they are in a position to "tutor" migrants from poor (or "backward") countries on what languages they must learn or how they must behave in order to be acceptable to them, it may well be that their hosts also have things to learn from the perspectives developed by those involved in transnational, multicultural lives.²⁰ In this same spirit, Shaun Moores and Monika Metykova observe that when migrants arrive in a new place, removed from the habitual national space of their country of origin, this "relocation" makes them more sensitive to the cultural assumptions that are taken for granted (and are thus invisible) to their host community.²¹ Elsewhere, Aksoy and Robins themselves argue that, in the changed experiential spaces of migration, new social and cultural possibilities are sometimes created by those

who live transnationalism as a banal fact of their everyday lives, who may thus be able to engage in innovative modes of social and cultural renegotiation beyond those normally accessible to more settled communities.²²

Certainly, in the contemporary era, for some migrants at least, migration is neither permanent nor irreversible. It is no longer a one-way trip in which the homeland can only ever subsequently be accessed in nostalgic reverie via the occasional airmail letter or an annual holiday or (perhaps) returned to on retirement. Indeed, it has been argued that we now see new forms of temporary migration, characterized by James Wood as displaying “a certain provisionality, a structure of departure and return that may [or may not] end.” This new pattern of what Woods terms “homelooseness” – is one in which the ties that bind the emigrant to home may have been loosened only on a temporary basis. If, as he argues, the states of exile or diaspora are, implicitly, “acute, massive and transformative” (in the scale of the trauma they connote), “homelooseness,” by contrast, is a more “secular” experience of mobility which, for many, is now “ordinary and even welcome … if rarely chosen entirely without ambivalence.”²³

However, while Woods is surely right to point to the emergence of these new modalities of migration, we should not imagine that they now represent the whole picture. In any one historical period, other “residual” forms and older patterns always remain in play, operating simultaneously alongside these newer modalities. Moreover, we should not imagine that such change as is occurring in these patterns is necessarily uniform across geographical space – particular areas and regions may well be characterized by quite different forms of migration. Further, we should note that much migration takes place between countries that have strong historical (and often postimperial) connections. To this extent, the modes of migration they display are often quite specific and may be better understood as “binational” (operating between two specific, closely related countries) rather than “global” or “transnational” in any abstract sense.

While the respective proportions of long- and short-term migrancy from different regions may currently be changing, it would be unwise to accept any teleological assumption that the current direction of change is permanent and unidirectional. Rather, it is always the product of specific historical and geopolitical circumstances – and therefore subject to further transformations in the future. Thus, Robins is at pains to recognize that we must avoid “unthinking Darwinist perspectives” that would assume that the historical process is a matter of linear change – for instance, from the national to the transnational era.²⁴ To that extent, echoing Ferdinand Braudel’s observation on the simultaneous existence of different historical times, Robins suggests the superiority of a geological metaphor – in which historical periods (or in this case, modes of migration) are seen as coexisting alongside and superimposed on each other in layers, rather than following each other in sequence. Viewed in that light, he offers a valuable perspective on these new forms of “temporary”

transnational migration which now coexist with the one-way, long-term forms of postcolonial migration that have been more familiar, at least in Europe, in the postwar period.

Place Polygamy and the "Relativization" of Community

At a quite fundamental level, modes of social analysis that fail to problematize the correspondence of culture and territory have now been quite undermined by the recognition, in Arjun Appadurai's well-known phrase, that "spatial localization, quotidian interaction and social scale are by no means always isomorphic."²⁵ As the physical movement of people is made easier, and cheaper by improved transport systems, the extended "reach" of electronic communications systems makes it possible for mobile people effectively to "be" in different places simultaneously. Through these virtual extensions of their physical selves, they thus experience a sense of what has been called "place polygamy" or "multilocationality." However, Appadurai's stress on situations where the mobilities of persons and messages exacerbate each other is only one of several possibilities. We also need to consider the converse situation of the many more sedentary populations all over the world for whom television consumption – just like Internet usage and air travel – still occurs mainly within relatively stable national frameworks.²⁶

In my own earlier work on media audiences, I increasingly came to focus on how media practices often reinforce and are materially inscribed in particular patterns of domesticity, architecture, and lifestyles among largely sedentary populations.²⁷ Conversely, Aksoy and Robins address migrant audiences' media consumption patterns in the context of their involvement in a range of virtual and material mobilities. They set their study of the viewing habits of Turkish migrants in London in the broader frame of their "mobile lifestyle," which incorporates a rich mixture of terrestrial and satellite media consumption, long-distance and local telephony, street gossip, and Internet exchanges alongside regular long-distance travel.²⁸ However if, for those migrants, their physical uprooting is articulated with their insertion into transnational media systems, conversely, for many other people, the messages of national broadcasting systems are reinforced by their more sedentary patterns of life and culture. The relations of the virtual and geographical realms thus may, in different cases, either destabilize or reinforce each other – but this is ultimately a matter for empirical investigation, rather than abstract speculation.

Besides the various forms of long-distance migrancy, we must also attend to the less "spectacular" and more "everyday" forms of mobility of majority populations. Besides migrants from elsewhere, some of the more affluent members of the prosperous societies of the global North are now also involved in long-distance social networks "stretched out" across geographical space, involving

“socializing at a distance” as an everyday practice. These networks are usually sustained by a combination of regular electronic contact and intermittent meeting up (in the form of what is referred to as “VFR Tourism” – visiting friends and relatives). Thus, mobility and distance do not necessarily destroy ties of care, support, and affection, which can be widely dispersed. This is especially true of people’s oldest and deepest relationships, which, once established, will often be kept going when old friends move far away through regular electronic/telephonic contact and occasional visits. For these people, their “network geographies … are accomplished through a combination of face-to-face meetings, travel, phone calls, text messages and e-mails.”²⁹ Nonetheless, this is far from being a majority experience within Europe as most people’s relationships still are local and most of their strongest ties remain within 25 kilometers of their homes.³⁰

2 Structures of Feeling: Affect and Experience

Being (In More Than One) There ...

As we have seen, geographical proximity or distance can nowadays be in substantial disjuncture with people’s sense of emotional connection, and networks of care and support and affection are sometimes significantly dispersed. For all these reasons, when thinking about the physical presence of migrants in different places, we have also to recognize the extent to which many are also (virtually) involved with other places in ongoing ways. This situation gives rise to what, in Williams’ classic terminology, can be regarded as a distinctive “structure of feeling.”³¹ In their discussion of recent migrant fiction, Robert Crawshaw and Corinne Fowler argue that certain literary texts can offer valuable perspectives on the overlapping layers of experience that characterize migrancy and cultural displacement. As they note, these texts can offer “alternative cartographies” that provide a visceral sense of how “the historical, the global and the local … [are now constituted] … within a single, multiply constituted, imagined space.” The formal properties of this literature (such as the frequent use of multiple voices from a variety of nonsynchronous times) offer an effective “staging” of the often dislocated nature of migrant experience. To take one example, they show how in Joe Pemberton’s novel *For Ever and Amen*, which is set in Manchester’s Moss Side district and told through the “voice” of a British-born child of West Indian immigrants, the area is effectively revealed as a “glocality” imbued with the absent presence of other lives and places in a manner which is directly “derived from the process of physical mobility, spread over several generations.”³²

To understand this sensibility more clearly, we can usefully return to my earlier discussion of Robins and Aksoy’s work, which provides just such an “alternative cartography” of the communicative lives of Turkish migrants in London. As noted, they move constantly between different cultural and communicative spaces, and in any one day, they might listen to a London-based

local radio station, receive packages brought by a lorry from a relative in Istanbul, and negotiate with a local travel company specializing in low-cost flights to Turkey about their next trip "home." All of this is routinely done in the context of a rich mixture of mobile phone conversations with other Turkish migrants in different parts of Europe and street interactions within their own community and with others in the locality – all with the chatter of Turkish satellite television in the background. Their complex usage of local and trans-national, broadcast and interpersonal media, along with their insertion into a highly developed system of mobility for the transport of persons and goods, means that they effectively participate simultaneously in communities in both locations. They exist in a space of "in-betweenness" involving multiple and overlapping spatial and symbolic attachments – and their participation in any one community is thus relativized; moreover, for them this is a thoroughly naturalized and taken-for-granted mode of life.³³

Multisite Households and "Absent Presences"

In her work on migrancy in the Caribbean, Karen Fog-Olwig has similarly observed the increasing normality of multisite households, in which one or more members of the household are physically absent, yet continue to play a significant role in family life so that there is a disjunction between space of "belonging" and place of residence.³⁴ The particular postcolonial combination of economic necessity and increasingly globalized communications systems has produced a new type of multisited household, one of whose constituent parts will, by definition, always be elsewhere.³⁵

The parents of photographer Vanley Burke migrated from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom before him, leaving him in the care of relatives. He talks movingly of how, in his own childhood "there was a real sense of absence in Jamaica; a large part of the community had moved abroad, but we talked about them a lot and exchanged letters and parcels. I couldn't stop thinking about where all these people had gone to."³⁶ However, as international telephony, Skype, and Internet communications have become more affordable, many migrants can now afford to be in contact with the family back home on a regular basis – to the extent of still playing a routine part in family decision-making processes, rather than simply being an "absent member" who makes the occasional symbolic phone call at Christmas or on a child's birthday. As Stephen Vertovec notes, for many migrants and their families "transnational connectivity through cheap telephone calls is at the heart of their lives," and as he indicates, cheap calls and Internet connections are now perhaps the "social glue" of migrant transnationalism.³⁷ Similarly, Jonas Larsen, Kay Axhausen, and John Urry observe how "networks of care, support and infection can [now] be traced over large geographical distances" via the exchange of "letters, packets, photographs, e-mails, money transactions, telephone calls and occasional

visits ... [which] ... connect disparate geographical locations." People can now simultaneously lead local lives while also sustaining significant long-distance relations with others who are far away by means of "complex dances of face-to-face encounters, scheduled meetings ... telephone calls, e-mails ... and online discussions."³⁸ Migration and mobility do not necessarily dissolve familial relations, as Deirdre McKay notes, as people use communication technologies to "generate narratives of connection around the globe ... making their long-distance communications more regular, intense and intimate."³⁹

Overall, most of these authors offer a relatively optimistic perspective on transnational migrancy, one which highlights the abilities that many of their migrant respondents develop (with the help of a variety of technologies) to be effectively in two places at once. But this is not the whole story. Elsewhere, Miller offers a very different picture: one of middle-aged Caribbean migrants who have ended up what is essentially "no man's land" in which they are neither accepted in their "host" country nor able effectively to go back home and readily find acceptance there. As he argues, the concept of "roots" has generally been celebrated as an unqualified "good" and romanticized as the "solution" to the issue of disruption caused by migration, but remaining "true to one's roots" may in fact create severe problems all round.⁴⁰ Ironically, the attempts of older migrants in London to live up to the conventional (and often almost Victorian) models of respectability that they learned in their Caribbean childhoods, far from helping them integrate into the United Kingdom (as they had hoped) sometimes only serve to mark them out as "cold," or "stand-offish" in the eyes of their contemporary white London neighbors.⁴¹ Conversely, migrants returning to the Caribbean sometimes find that those whom they left behind cannot easily accept them back as they feel that the migrants have, in fact, become too English ("snobbish") in their ways.⁴² Here we enter the terrain of the emotional and affective dimensions of the migrant experience which quite transcends its more narrowly conceived economic or instrumental motivations.

Translocal Subjectivities: Networked Feelings

Conventional models of migration tend to presume the same vision of their subject as does classical economics: the supposedly "rational" individual, bent on maximizing their satisfactions by means of utilitarian calculation concerning the options open to them. Evidently this is a fantasy figure – but many accounts of migrancy still overlook how emotional commitments and obligations continue to tie both kinship and friendship networks together across distance. Here we must recognize, with Larsen, Axhausen, and Urry that "migration is rarely an isolated decision pursued by individual agents" but rather a process involving a range of kin and other contacts and "most people's biographies and travel patterns are relational, connected and embedded, rather than individualized."⁴³ In this connection, David Conradson and Dierdre McKay use Appadurai's concept

of “translocal subjectivity” to address the topic not simply of individual migration but also of how communities become “extended” via the geographical mobility of their members across (sometimes distant) sites: many transnational migrants will continue to invest emotionally in their relationships with friends and family in more than one location. They may well use a variety of technologies to make financial remittances, to send gifts and expressions of affection and support from afar, and they will also travel great distances to attend symbolic social occasions such as births, weddings, and funerals.⁴⁴

Further, the subjectivities of these migrants are better understood as translocal, rather than transnational, insofar as their emotional affiliations are usually with particular localities, not with nations. Taking the particular case of Turkish migrants in Sweden, Miyase Christensen’s work demonstrates how loyalties based on physical coproximity, originating in a rural village thousands of miles away, can be transposed to distant contexts. Given the mechanics of the process of chain migration, once a person is established in a given location, their friends and relatives are likely to follow them there. Hence many migrants, even in their new “host” country, still live closely with people from their place of origin.⁴⁵ If migrants inhabit fluid virtual networks of dispersed contacts, they are still anchored in the materiality of local spaces, and their mediated transnational activities take place at the juncture of the online and off-line worlds.⁴⁶

Love, Loss, and Money: The Sadness of Geography

The decision to migrate is rarely taken in isolation from social (and, crucially, familial) networks: neither is it necessarily motivated by the “rational” calculation of economic or political advantage. It is much more often driven by feelings of love, desire, and loyalty – and these emotional factors play an important part in constructing the map of migratory paths.⁴⁷ As Anne-Marie Fortier argues, “migrant horizons include a multitude of imaginings that are dense with … feelings of fear, excitement happiness, sadness and anger, loss, [and] ambivalence.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, we need to understand the sensuous economy of migrancy – as an embodied practice with imaginative and affective dimensions in which encounters with place, people, food, smells, local customs, and sounds move through the body and give rise to bodily sensations together with emotive responses.⁴⁹

Geographical mobility challenges the spatial frames to which individuals are accustomed, and this often involves a troubling sense of ontological destabilization for the new migrant as many of the fundamental assumptions of their previously taken-for-granted lifeworld are thrown into disarray.⁵⁰ Naturally enough, among regular travelers the position may be quite different: those studied by Magdalena Nowicka evinced a sense that, for them, “the dualism of presence and absence … [was] … a part of [their] normality, and [an] intrinsic ingredient of their mundane activities,” and they had all found pragmatic ways

to utilize the “teletechnologies” of distance communication to sustain themselves during periods of absence from home.⁵¹

Nonetheless, many of these migrants remain painfully aware of what Michael Ondaatje called the “sadness of geography” and are conscious that these technologies cannot ultimately replace face-to-face interaction with family and friends far away nor fully substitute for physical copresence.⁵² Thus Nowicka observes that “regular migrants” are well aware that their habitual absences from home make it hard for them to fulfil “the claim of continuity … the expectation [of] physical presence that guarantees … continuous participation in the life of a place, its development and its trajectories.”⁵³ All of these considerations go to show that, following Conradson and McKay, we need to focus on the emotional dimensions of mobility and on the “range of feelings that emerge as a consequence of dwelling within and mov[ing] through places.” This perspective also allows us to highlight better the complex forms of emotional labor that are required to sustain multisite households across geographical distance, involving the juggling of contradictory feelings of loss, nostalgia, and obligation that interweave the economic and the emotional.⁵⁴

Moreover, the distinction between the emotional (or the affective, in more contemporary parlance) and the economic is often, in practice, blurred. It is now well recognized that migrants’ remittances from abroad often represent very substantial contributions to the relevant national economy. The amount of money being “sent home” by migrants has tripled since the mid-2000s and is now three times the size of the global total of foreign aid, making these remittances the main source of money flowing into the poor South of the world.⁵⁵ However, the significance of these remittances cannot be considered only in terms of their economic function, as we must also recognize their affective significance and value. They help constitute dense networks of not only financial but also moral and emotional bonds over long distances – as one of McKay’s respondents pithily puts it “sending dollars shows feeling.”

Material and Virtual Modes of Circulation

If the circulation of people, and of money – with both its economic and emotionally symbolic powers – need to be seen in relation to each other, the same goes for the circulation of symbolic objects more generally, as Appadurai showed so well in his early work *The Social Life of Things*.⁵⁶ In relation to the question of the significance of mobile things, we need to develop a perspective that can deal with both the material and the virtual dimensions of circulation. We thus have to consider how the mobilities of objects that represent or symbolize places (metonymically or metaphorically) also serve to make them “mobile.” In the case of the (relatively) sedentary population of a given nation, Lauren Berlant argues that the “National Symbolic” is constructed by means

of both the material circulation of the citizens around the nation's sacred landscapes and monuments and by the virtual circulation of those images in broadcast or otherwise mediated form throughout the lives (and homes) of the population.⁵⁷ If, traditionally, a sacred space has been conceived of as a territorially fixed entity, nonetheless, icons and other "travelling objects" serve to effectively circulate tokens and images of the sacred throughout the surrounding realm of the profane. Thus, if pilgrims circulate centrifugally from the periphery towards the sacred zone at the "center," at the same time, portable souvenirs themselves travel centripetally from the center to the peripheries.⁵⁸

The same applies at the level of the profane, as it is not just human bodies that move through space. Thus Divya Tolia-Kelly observes that "in leaving their place of origin, migrants often carry parts of it with them, which are reassembled in the material form of textures, foods, colours, scents and sounds, reconfiguring the place of arrival both figuratively and imaginatively."⁵⁹ Similarly, transnational relationships are often embodied in the food and gifts shuffled back and forwards across borders. We see all this exemplified in the objects that migrants take and bring with them on their journeys.⁶⁰ The packed cars and bulging suitcases of migrant and refugee families often contain whole households reduced to that which emigrants can physically transport with them – clothing, small bits of furniture, domestic artifacts, cherished treasures – treasured objects from home that serve to represent a whole way of life.⁶¹ As John Berger has commented, the migrant's suitcase plays a key symbolic role. It might be hidden away in a cupboard filled with things from home, containing materials symbolizing familial memories. It might embody the new life promised by moving to another country. As a material object, it may, in effect, become a talismanic "companion" on the migrant's journey.⁶²

As one Polish migrant explains, on her initial departure from home, her suitcase contained "stuff I liked and felt bad not having near me – some books and CDs, my favourite pot plant, a tiny radio with an alarm clock I liked to have by my bed, some pictures, my favourite pen and pencil."⁶³ Conversely, their suitcases are also filled, on the way home, with gifts for family, friends, and relatives. These symbolize the migrant's successful achievements during their period away from home and demonstrate, by their evident cost, by the care which has gone into choosing them and the effort of carrying them, the affection and love the migrant feels towards the people they left behind. At the end of a visit home, the suitcase will often be refilled with homemade foodstuffs and familiar domestic objects, which offer a constant reminder of home and a link back to those left behind. To this extent, these transported objects are key parts in a long-distance gift economy which, just as much as in the Trobriand Islands, serves to tie together all those who participate and "travelling suitcases full of gifts and apparently mundane products are just as important as e-mails, telephone calls and Skype for keeping migrants feeling connected to [their homeland]."⁶⁴

3 Migrant Perspectives: Lines of Flight

Desperate Straits

Even if mobility is an increasingly routinized part of their lives for some people, not all “lines of flight” are open to them – and the forms of mobility they desire often operate in the face of severe obstacles. For the many thousands of migrants marooned on the “wrong side” of the Gibraltar Straits, while Tangier has become “the destination and jumping-off point for 1000 hopes,” theirs is a narrative of attenuated migration, and these are also “desperate straits” in an emotional, as well as a geographical sense.⁶⁵ The work of the Moroccan photographer Yto Barrada focuses on the straits as a deeply contested strategic space, characterized by contradictory modes of mobility and stasis. If Morocco is a desirable destination for Western tourists, whose spending provides a key source of income for its economy, the straits (along with the fences at Cuerta) provides the principal barrier to the mobility of those who dream of “resurrection” in a paradisical European afterlife.⁶⁶ As Okwui Enwezor notes, we see here a paradoxical contrast “between the attractiveness of the Straits as a holiday destination” for tourists and, for would-be migrants a “leaping off point from which escape from Morocco is launched.”⁶⁷

Barrada’s photos capture the prevailing mood of a country many of whose citizens are caught in a permanent state of waiting to leave: they show people gazing across the straits towards the tantalizingly nearby coast of Gibraltar; picture them sitting on a rooftop from which the hills of Spain can be seen in the distance; or show the physical remnants of idealistic schemes to join the two continents – such as the now disused tunnel entrance of an abandoned engineering project that would have connected Tangier with Spain. These dilemmas are also well exemplified in Tahar Ben Jelloun’s novel *Leaving Tangier*, noted in Chapter 4. One of his would-be migrant characters is initially joyful that in Tangier “you can smell Europe, you see Europe and its lights, you touch Europe with your fingertips and it smells good, it awaits you, just ... eight or nine little miles.” However, at a later point, having become more disillusioned about his own prospects of ever becoming mobile, he then says that he has realized how Spain is now “moving fast, Europe’s pulling it North, away from us and although we used to think we were close ... in truth, there are thousands of miles between them and us.”⁶⁸

Flows of Capital, People, and Data ...

As indicated earlier, my concerns are with the simultaneous flows of bodies, resources, commodities, capital, and technologies. In this respect the path-breaking work of Ursula Biemann repays sustained examination – especially as

she focuses on the articulation of macro issues, such as the geopolitics of energy flows with the specific, lived realities of those in particular cultural contexts whose lives are thereby transformed. Her project on the geopolitics of the building of the massive BTC oil pipeline in the Caucasus takes as its starting point the endless queues of oil tankers which daily block the Bosphorus Straits outside Istanbul.⁶⁹ It is through these increasingly overcrowded and hazardous straits that the oil of the Caspian region currently is transported to the Mediterranean and beyond. The pipeline, running from Baku on the Caspian, through Georgia to Ceyhan on the Turkish Mediterranean coast is designed to bypass this bottleneck and speed up the strategic flow of oil to global markets

Istanbul is, of course, not simply a major bottleneck in the global circulation of oil but also the site of one of the highest concentrations of migration flows in the region. Biemann notes that “tens of thousands of migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Moldova and Russia” pass through Istanbul every year. Most of them are illegal and they will spend months (or perhaps years) there, earning enough money in Istanbul to pay the smugglers’ fees required to get to their desired destinations in Northern or Mediterranean Europe.⁷⁰ She is concerned with how these intersections of global capital and human geography are intricately connected through international visa agreements and with the dynamics of regional politics and histories.⁷¹ Her further concern is with how these macro processes connect with a wide variety of “local” issues. As she notes, the building of the pipeline represents “a massive foreign incision in a fragile region” triggering “social reconfigurations, reshuffl[ing] economic privileges ... old ethnic ties and ... new affiliations.”⁷² She shows how these geopolitical transformations necessitate a whole variety of micropolitical adjustments at the everyday level, for the communities disrupted by the pipeline’s construction. Further, she also shows how its development is intimately connected with issues which seem, at first sight, unconnected – such as the development of the Black Sea basin as a major trading place for the trafficking of women in the global sex trade – as clearly demonstrated by the boom in prostitution in the Turkish border town of Trabzon, servicing the workers on the pipeline.

While overall, commodity flows find much easier passage to the West than do poor migrants, a clear exception is made in the case of young women – whose passage to more affluent regions is not only allowed but encouraged (while under the most dismal and exploitative conditions) as they are transformed into a valuable commodity to be traded. Here, we must also understand the interdependence of flows of data, images (whether “romantic” or pornographic) and bodies, in the transnational electronic “marriage markets” that the Internet now supports.⁷³ Electronic communication often forms the basis of markets for virtual brides, providing them with a potential route out of Third World poverty. It offers an escape route to the West for entrepreneurial women prepared to “self-exoticize” themselves by trading (in the first instance, visual images of) their desirability as a preliminary to a marriage that will get

them a visa to enter the countries of their dreams. As Biemann notes, new geographies are thus being mapped out by the transportation “[of young] women from minority populations and slum communities” for trafficking. For these women, these are the only available “circuits of survival,” and here again, the virtual circulation of their images and actual circulation of their physical bodies are critically interdependent.⁷⁴

Geopolitics from Below: Against Victim Perspectives

Conventionally, the terrain of geopolitics is assumed to be the preserve of powerful activists such as nation-states, but Biemann is concerned to recognize also the strategies (and tactics) used by exiles and migrants.⁷⁵ Here we must, of course, beware the danger of inventing some kind of “romanticized teleology” of migrancy that would “invest messianic potential in the people most deprived of rights today.”⁷⁶ Nonetheless, as T.J. Demos observes, Biemann insists that accounts of migration must extend “a sense of organisation, determination and agency” to its subjects and represent the migrants’ own contestation of their disempowered status.⁷⁷ Her aim is to produce a narrative cartography that transcends conventional frames of reference by superimposing on the normative cartographies of power the transgressive lines “drawn” by the migrants’ journeys.⁷⁸

One issue here is how to get away from the conventional politics of visual representation, in which the migrants themselves are literally invisible, except at the point of their failure (or capture). Thus Biemann’s video *Sahara Chronicle* outlines a “geography of resistance” showing migrants as “mobile, inventive and highly organized” as they struggle “against the sovereignty that otherwise excludes them.”⁷⁹ This involves the attempt to provide a map of the “invisible journeys” of the “*sans papiers*” from their own perspective. Thus she focuses on the moment of maximum potentiality – at the moment of departure, when the excitement of those seeking to reach the labor markets of the northeast is tangible among the passengers, as they set off northwards on their trans-Saharan journeys.⁸⁰

Biemann’s project explores the micropolitics of mobility and containment in the broader context of the long history of colonial entanglements underlying the present sub-Saharan exodus towards Europe, treating this network of mobilities as a social practice embedded in very specific local and historical conditions. Historically, these conditions were created when the Sahara, across which the Tuareg tribes had always roamed, was split into different territories by the European powers at the Berlin conference of 1884, thus creating the historical basis of what today are the separate nations of Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Chad.⁸¹ While the Tuareg were always denied a state of their own, they still constitute substantial minorities within each of these countries and maintain their distinct linguistic and cultural links across the official

boundaries. To this extent, as Biemann observes, given that Tuareg territorial structure is, by definition, transnational, the conceptual difference between nomadic and colonial politics of space lies at the heart of this contested zone. Her project is to produce a “diagram” of the geopolitical reality of North African migration, which is centered on forgotten places, which now remerge as crucial nodes in the international migration network.

The specific place which Biemann focuses on here is Agadiz, capital of the Tuareg, the trans-Saharan trading center that functions as the southern gateway to the main migrant routes going north. The project reveals “an elaborate system of information exchange, routing and social organisation that spans the Sahara” and a web of temporary improvisations made up of “obstinate practices of local space, which resist and circumvent attempts to discipline them.” The Tuareg’s unique topographical experience is in high demand as a steady flow of sub-Saharan migrants pass through their territory and they daily repurpose their age-old caravan routes as highways for illicit migration.⁸² In this context, they have developed a highly flexible and effective system for the illicit transportation of illegal migrants. This is a system that combines their deep-rooted historical expertise in the topography of the desert with their skills as drivers and mechanics capable of dealing with the challenges posed by this inhospitable territory and their newly developed skills with mobile electronic communications technologies. In this respect, the Tuareg’s use of these sophisticated technologies is comparable to that of the Somalian “hi-tech pirates” operating in the Gulf of Aden that is discussed later in the book in connection with container shipping.⁸³

Migration, Imagination, and Ingenuity

Thus far, much of the work on migrancy has concentrated on the starkly contrasting cases of business professionals and relatively underprivileged migrants. These phenomena have largely been studied from opposite perspectives, with the mobility of business elites treated as an “asset” to them (and to the world economy) and that of migrants treated as a problem, a form of suffering to be “relieved.” This is a dichotomy that certainly makes good sense in the context of the question of who has power over their mobility, but if we only see migrants as “victims” deprived of agency, we fail to recognize their resourcefulness. To do so, as Florian Schnieder observes, is to “reduc[e] migration to mystery and calamity.”⁸⁴ In Europe, the new migrants from the East often strategically search out “temporary opportunities and benefits that can be transferred to and recycled within their local economies.”⁸⁵ In this context, Dina Petrescu describes how, at one point, migrants from northern Romania had discovered that, by periodically leaving their homes for the West, and making a bid for political asylum there, they could generate enough money in welfare entitlements during the period in which their (always unsuccessful) bid was being processed, to enable them to extend and improve their homes on their return. To this extent, she argues, “migrants are the products of

frontiers." They cross them, mocking their porosity, but "at the same time, they need them, attracted ... by what is on the other side ... [their] ... main objective is ... [often] ... to make a profit from a line of flight."⁸⁶

In a similar spirit, Biemann insists that we recognize the powers of ingenuity shown daily by those living in the cracks and fissures between the official borders of nation-states – as they constantly have to develop inventive tactics of evasion to avoid the increasingly sophisticated technologies intended to control them.⁸⁷ Similarly, Appadurai stresses the fact that "today, many people *have to* improvise: if you are in a refugee camp, and the price of bread is going up by magnitudes of a hundred every few minutes, then improvisation is part of a survival apparatus, in which the imagination has to be mobilised, simply in the business of getting from today to tomorrow."⁸⁸ If migration is a practice involving imagination and ingenuity, it is also one with its own forms of know-how and expertise. An excellent example of this expertise is provided by Matei Bejenaru's "Travelling Guide," which takes the form of a comparative cost–benefit analysis offering detailed advice to potential Romanian migrants on the relative risk levels (and possible benefits) of attempting to migrate illegally to a range of different European countries.⁸⁹

The "Guide" informs the prospective migrant reader not only about relative wages and living costs in England, France, Italy, and Spain but also about the various legal obstacles it will be necessary to evade to reach each country, and the relative efficiency of the border police of each nation. A careful comparison is also offered of the best routes to take to avoid detection; the best crossing points to use; the best times of day or night to use specific ones; and the relative risks and advantages of different modes of transport. In the case of those hoping to smuggle themselves across the Channel into England, from France or Belgium, by hiding in a truck or freight train, detailed maps are provided of different harbors, and very precise information is given as to which particular parking lots, in which harbors, at what time of day or night are most likely to offer the migrant a good chance of smuggling him- or herself aboard. The migrant is further advised exactly what equipment will be needed: worker's overalls, a hard-hat helmet, and a dock newspaper, if hoping to gain access to a port; a sleeping bag with aluminum foil thermal material to block the efficiency of the sensors that attempt to detect any body heat within the cargo of a freight vehicle; and a carefully calculated minimum supply of water and dry food, depending on the number of hours the particular crossing will take. Ultimately, the would-be migrant to the United Kingdom is advised that the best option of all is to book a flight from Romania to a Scandinavian country that does not require entrance visas in advance. The migrant is then counseled to insist, when booking his trip, that he wishes to change planes in London Heathrow and to purchase a ticket that will enable him to arrive in Heathrow late at night, ostensibly to then catch his connecting flight to Scandinavia early the next morning. It is then explained that, after 1.00 a.m., when Heathrow is almost deserted, and some areas close down briefly, it is easier to evade the controls

and slip out of the airport, and sometimes even possible to obtain a 24-hour “Entrance Visa” so as to leave the airport legally, to go to a hotel (supposedly) to wait for a connecting flight in the morning ...

Migrants need ingenuity not only to cross borders but also to survive on a daily basis in a foreign territory where they are often aware of being barely tolerated. In his own autobiographical account of migrant experience, Gazmend Kapllani outlines the delicate business of learning to “fit in.” As he says, from the migrant point of view, rather than loudly demanding the multicultural right to be different, in practice, the main craving is often “the right to be exactly the same as everyone else ... to go unnoticed, to be invisible.”⁹⁰ The problem is that, in order to fit in, the migrant must learn the language, but “in his hands, the language is not spoken but broken ... he butchers it,” and he soon learns from the looks on his listeners’ faces that it is better for him to be mute rather than annoying. So the migrant learns the language’s colloquial expressions, to show he “belongs,” and trains himself to learn people’s names quickly – even if they never learn his own “strange, difficult, foreign name.” But there are many ironies here: it may be as migrants’ language skills grow, they think of themselves as more likely to “make it.” But, Kapllani warns, the danger is that once you have learnt it, then you “really feel utterly and completely foreign” because now you understand what they are saying about you in the “relentless theatre” of the television news, which allots you mainly the part of “absolute evil, blackness – the foreigner.”⁹¹

Fortress Europe and the (Televised) Return of the Medieval Pilgrims

At this point, my argument completes the circle begun at the start of this chapter and rehearsed in my earlier discussion of these matters.⁹² Here we return to the question of how the actual presence (and the virtual representation of) the migrant functions as one of the forms of ontological threat that provide such a crucial part of the dynamic of contemporary political life in Europe. Some commentators, including Timothy Garton Ash, argued that Europe’s “migrant crisis” of 2015–2016 represented a symbolic event of the same order of importance as the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989. As he put it: “what we are seeing in 2015 is Europe’s reverse 1989. Remember that the physical demolition of the Iron Curtain started with the cutting of the barbed wire fence between Hungary and Austria. Now it is Hungary that has led the way in building new fences and ... stoking prejudice ... [to] ... keep out ... migrants.”⁹³

In this crisis, the European news media continually showed heartbreakingly footage of would-be migrants (and their children) drowning in the Mediterranean or dying on the beaches of Italy and Greece. Throughout the period, viewers saw coverage of a bedraggled crowd of refugees and asylum seekers trudging, for weeks at a time, in all kinds of weather, throughout the

length of the Balkans, in search of entry to the borders of Fortress Europe. Many in this procession walked all the way from Macedonia to Germany, running the gauntlet of the ever-shifting porosity and impenetrability of different borders, as European leaders veered between liberal and protectionist responses to the crisis. At this point the central autoroute running from south to north through this territory – the “E5” discussed in Chapter 2, and once known as the “highway of brotherhood and unity” in what was then Yugoslavia – took on a quite new meaning. The images shown of this debacle looked, for all the world, more like a medieval foot pilgrimage of the damned seeking salvation in the Promised Land than anything properly belonging to the contemporary era of high-speed travel, global connectivity, and time-space compression. It would be hard to find a more vivid illustration of the key role of the various technologies of transport, communications border-maintenance, and containment involved in the construction and maintenance of Fortress Europe.

Notes

- 1 D. Morley (2000) *Home Territories*, Routledge.
- 2 Quoted in D. Massey (2005) *For Space*, Sage, p. 79 – referring to F. Jameson (1991) *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, pp. 356–357.
- 3 See D. Chakrabarty (2001) Europe as a Problem of Indian History, *Traces* 1, 159–182 on this issue.
- 4 J. Fabian (1983) *Time and the Other*, Columbia University Press, p. 35.
- 5 Cf. R. Wilk (1996) Colonial Time and TV Time, *Visual Anthropology Review*. On the “waiting room of history” see Chakrabarty, Europe as a Problem.
- 6 See E. Reitz (2005) *Heimat: A Chronicle of Endings and Beginnings*, Series 3, Artificial Eye. When the Cold War ended in 1989, 20,000 American soldiers stationed in Germany departed, bringing to an end the American presence that had been in place ever since the end of the Second World War departed. Their empty barracks were filled with ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union who had been transported to Siberia by Stalin and were only then able to return to what they regarded as their ancestral home – even if to their would-be German compatriots they were simply unsettling ghosts from a forgotten era. See W. Cook (2004) There’s No Place Like Home, *Independent on Sunday* (September 19); cf. also D. Morley and K. Robins (1990) No Place Like Heimat, *New Formations* 12; cf. also S. Winder (2013) *Danuba*, Picador, on the earlier moment when the previously “Ottoman” areas and populations of the Danube basin were “returned” to the West, as the Ottoman Empire crumbled.
- 7 Cf. D. Morley and K. Robins (1995) Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic, *Spaces of Identity*, Routledge.
- 8 A. Beckett (2012) For Richer, Not for Poorer, *The Guardian* (November 17).

- 9 G. Lewis (2006) Journeying Towards the Nation(al): Cultural Difference at the Crossroads of Old and New Globalisations, *Mobilities* 1 (3), 336.
- 10 A. Travis (2009) Here Today and Gone Tomorrow: A New Breed of Migrants, *The Guardian* (August 6).
- 11 H. Sherwood (2014) 10 Years On and Poles are Glad to Call Britain Home, *The Observer* (April 27). Pauline Hingston claimed in that interview that “many Eastern Europeans are racist to people like me who have built up the NHS and transport infrastructures in this country, and that makes me very angry.”
- 12 K. Robins and A. Aksoy (2016) *Transnationalism, Migration and the Challenge to Europe*, Routledge.
- 13 D. Miller (2008) Migration, Material Culture and Tragedy: Four Moments in Caribbean Migration, *Mobilities* 3 (3), 403, 401.
- 14 Cf. T. Kaiser (2008) Social and Ritual Activity In and out of Place, *Mobilities* 3 (3). Cf. my later discussion, in Chapter 9, of an incident in the port of Naples when the trade in smuggling the bodies of dead Chinese migrants who had paid to be buried back in their home villages in China was revealed by an accident with an unsecured container that spilled the corpses into the sea.
- 15 A. Hargreaves (1997) Satellite Viewing Among Ethnic Minorities in France, *European Journal of Communication* 12 (4).
- 16 H. Kureishi (1998) *My Son The Fanatic*, Faber.
- 17 Cf. Sara Ahmed’s critique of the “metaphorization” of migrancy – see Chapter 2.
- 18 Cf. I. Ditchev (2008) *Mobile Citizenship*, Eurozine.
- 19 K. Robins (2008) Dear Europe, Dear Turkey, Why are You Making us So Depressed? *Third Text* 22 (1), 53; K. Robins and A. Aksoy (2015) *Transnationalism, Migration and the Challenge to Europe*, Routledge.
- 20 Robins, Dear Europe.
- 21 S. Moores and M. Metykova (2010) I Didn’t Realise How Attached I Am: On the Environmental Experiences of Transeuropean Migrants, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (2), 32.
- 22 Moores and Metykova, I Didn’t Realise, 171 to 189; A. Aksoy and K. Robins (2003) The Enlargement of Meaning, *International Journal of Communication Studies* 65 (4–5) 374–375.
- 23 J. Wood (2014) On Not Going Home, *London Review of Books* (February 20), 6, 7, 8; cf. S. Ossman (2007) *The Places We Share: Migration, Subjectivity and Global Mobility*, Lexington Books on issues of “serial migration.”
- 24 Robins, Dear Europe, 48.
- 25 A. Appadurai (1996) *Modernity at Large*, University of Minnesota Press, p. 22.
- 26 Cf. K. Hafez on the same phenomenon regarding Internet flows: (2006) *The Myth of Media Globalisation*, Polity Press.
- 27 Morley, *Home Territories*.
- 28 A. Aksoy and K. Robins (2000) Thinking Across Spaces: Transnational Television from Turkey, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3 (3), 343–365. See also my discussion at the end of this chapter of how Aksoy and Robins’ perspective links to

that advocated, variously, by Horst, Miller, and Slater about what they call (in a different usage from that previously developed by Neil Postman) “media ecologies.”

29 J. Larsen, K. Axhausen, and J. Urry (2006) *Geographies of Social Networks, Mobilities* 1 (2), 279–280.

30 Cf. my earlier comments on this issue of continuing “local ties” in Chapter 4.

31 Cf. R. Williams (1961) *The Long Revolution*, Penguin.

32 R. Cranshaw and C. Fowler (2008) *Articulation, Imagined Space and Virtual Mobility in Literary Narratives of Migration*, *Mobilities* 3 (3), 455, 460, 458, 464. Evidently, to quote such material in this context is also, implicitly, to support the authors’ argument that literary narratives themselves can usefully complement conventional social science methodologies as “data sources.” These novels are “distillations” of experience that are illuminating in their own right, insofar as they offer summative portraits of significant facets of contemporary behavior and ways of thinking that are grounded in real life observation.

33 However, in this connection Myria Georgiou recognizes that even in an era of online communications, territoriality remains deeply rooted in political conceptions of identity, especially when transposed into questions of passports, visas, and citizenship rights. As she notes, if flows of culture and communication undermine national boundaries, nonetheless, nation-states are still based on ideas of singular loyalty. It is in this context that she places the significance of diaspora where, as a result of their own (or their ancestors’) mobility, migrants experience different worlds and cultures simultaneously. M. Georgiou (2011) *Diaspora, Mediated Communication and Space*, in M. Christensen, A. Jansson, and C. Christensen (eds.), *Online Territories*, Peter Lang, pp. 205–220.

34 K. Fog-Olwig (1993) Defining the National in the Transnational, *Ethnos* 3–4. See my later discussion of the role of the mobile phone in multisite households at the end of Chapter 8.

35 In their study of the ways in which the Internet is used in the cultural context of Trinidad, Daniel Miller and Don Slater also note how heavily the island depends on the routine electronic remittance of money “back home” by migrants working in different parts of the globe. D. Miller and D. Slater (2000) *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, Berg.

36 V. Burke (2014) My Best Shot, *The Guardian* (June 26), G2. See also the catalog to the “At Home With Vanley Burke” exhibition, Ikon Gallery Birmingham, 2015.

37 S. Vertovec (2004) Cheap Calls: The Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism, *Global Networks* 4, 223.

38 Larsen, Axhausen, and Urry, *Geographies of Social Networks*, 265; Wellman quoted in Larsen, Axhausen, and Urry, *Geographies of Social Networks*, 261.

39 D. McKay (2007) Sending Dollars Shows Feeling: Emotions and Economies in Filipino Migration, *Mobilities* 1 (2), 179–180.

40 Miller, Migration, Material Culture and Tragedy, 397, 409.

41 See Alexander Baron’s 1963 novel *The Lowlife* (republished by Black Spring Press, 2010) on British working-class perceptions of Caribbean migrants in

London in the 1960s. Sometimes they saw the migrants as confusing the “tenses” of British history itself, by resembling a black version of the Victorians.

42 By way of contrast, it seems that those who migrated to America, where there was little chance of them ever being accepted, and where they thus made less effort to “fit in,” find it easier to reintegrate on their return.

43 Larsen, Axhausen, and Urry, *Geographies of Social Networks*, 268; U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim (2003) *Individualisation*, Sage.

44 D. Conradson and D. McKay (2007) *Translocal Subjectivities: Mobility, Connection, Emotion, Mobilities* 2 (2), 168.

45 M. Christensen (2011) Online Social Media, in M. Christensen, A. Jansson, and C. Christensen (eds.), *Online Territories*, Peter Lang; on generational differences in communicative practices among Arab migrants in France, see also Hargreaves, *Satellite Viewing*.

46 Christensen, Online Social Media. In this context, Christensen rightly insists that, rather than accepting simplistic accounts of how global mobility is enhanced by technologies such as online social media, their usage patterns must be studied empirically in their particular social context.

47 N. Mai and R. King (2009) Love, Sexuality and Migration, *Mobilities* 4 (3), 297.

48 A.-M. Fortier (2006) The Politics of Scaling, *Mobilities* 1 (3), 324–325.

49 Cf. S. Ahmed (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press.

50 See my comments on Moores and Metykova earlier in the chapter in relation to how migrants “see” things that are invisible/taken for granted by locals.

51 M. Nowicka (2006) Mobility, Space and Social Structuration, *Mobilities* 1 (3), 425.

52 M. Ondaatje quoted in D. Morley and K. Robins (1995) *Spaces of Identity*, Routledge.

53 Nowicka, Mobility, 429.

54 Conradson and McKay, *Translocal Subjectivities*, 169, 171.

55 C. Provost (2013) Migrant Billions Put Aid in the Shade, *The Guardian* (January 30).

56 A. Appadurai (1986) *The Social Life of Things*, Cambridge University Press.

57 Cf. S. Lash and J. Friedman (eds.) (1992) Introduction, in *Modernity and Identity*, Blackwell, p. 20; L. Berlant (1996) The Theory of Infantile Citizenship, in G. Eley and R. Suny (eds.), *Becoming National*, Oxford University Press.

58 V. Della Dora (2009) Taking Sacred Space Out of Place, *Mobilities* 4 (2); V. Bajc (2007) Creating Ritual Through Narrative, Place and Performance, *Mobilities* 2 (3).

59 D. Tolia-Kelly quoted in Della Dora, Taking Sacred Space, 229.

60 To take a different example, Lucy Norris has analyzed how European tourists in India now often bring home with them saris specially made for them in India, not simply as signifiers of their authentically exotic journeys but also as representations of their own transition from one state of being to another, forming a “correlation between the journeys made by the saris and the transformation of

the self during travelling." In specialist markets, tailors are now offer Western travelers the opportunity to have clothes made from "antique" Indian materials but in Western styles. These hybrid clothes "recreate traveler's back-pack wardrobes at a fraction of their cost in the West, with the added bonus of being recognizably fashionable garments, unique in their combination of western style and Indian fabric." The traveler who buys such a garment is "creating a record of the 'here and now' when s/he is in India, being a traveller, entering into the spirit of the adventure by imbuing the spirit of the cloth, but on their own terms. It is also new, remade ... transformed into something fashionable ... an old piece of cloth reinvested with meaning" L. Norris (2008) *Recycling and Reincarnation: The Journeys of Indian Saris' Mobilities* 3 (3) 434, 428, 432.

- 61 P. Basu and S. Coleman (2008) Migrant Worlds, Material Cultures, *Mobilities* 3 (3), 316. See the section on this same topic in my earlier book, Morley, *Home Territories*, pp. 44–47.
- 62 J. Berger (1975) *The Seventh Man*, Penguin.
- 63 K. Burrell (2008) Materialising the Border, *Mobilities* 3 (3), 356, 363.
- 64 Burrell, Materialising the Border, 365–366, 370; B. Malinowski (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Dutton.
- 65 Y. Barrada quoted in O. Enwezor (2011) A Radiant Conflagration, in Y. Barrada *Riffs*, Deutsche Guggenheim exhibition catalog, Frankfurt, p. 22.
- 66 N. Tazi (2007) The State of the Straits, *Afterall: Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 16 (Autumn/Winter), 92.
- 67 O. Enwezor (2011) A Radiant Conflagration, in Y. Barrada, *Riffs*, Deutsche Guggenheim exhibition catalog, Frankfurt, p. 24.
- 68 T. Ben Jelloun (2009) *Leaving Tangier*, Arcadia Books, pp.117 and 125. See also the passage noted in Chapter 4, where Ben Jelloun wishes he were a parcel so that he could reach Europe more easily. Sometimes, the migrant's path to their would-be destination is literally inconceivable. An African migrant character in Henning Mankel's novel *The Shadow Girls* (Vintage 2013) says that at the point of leaving her home she "didn't know where Italy was. I didn't even know where Africa was, that there were continents in the world separated by great oceans. I had heard about Europe and its riches and I had heard about America, but no one had told me there were no direct paths leading to these places," p. 274).
- 69 U. Biemann (2007) The Black Sea Files, in A. Franke (ed.), *B-Zone: Europe and Beyond*, KW Institute for Arts.
- 70 See Biemann, The Black Sea Files, p. 68.
- 71 Cf. Biemann, Black Sea Files; see also U. Biemann (2009/10) Counter Geographies, *Art and Research* 3 (1) (Winter); available at www.art.research.org.uk/v3n1/Biemann.HTML (accessed November 14, 2016).
- 72 U. Biemann (2010) *Mission Reports: Artistic Practices in the Field/Video Works 1998–2008*, Bildmuseet/Arnolfini Gallery, p. 70.
- 73 Cf. U. Biemann (2010) Turning Bodies into Codes, in *Mission Reports*.

74 U. Biemann (2010) Reorganising Women on a Global Scale, in *Mission Reports*, p. 41.

75 U. Biemann quoted in T.J. Demos (2010) Sahara Chronicle: Videos Migrant Geography, in Biemann, *Mission Reports*, p. 180.

76 A. Charlesworth (2009/10) Review of U. Biemann – *Mission Reports, Art and Research* 3 (1) (Winter). Indeed, one could argue that contemporary migrant's burden is heavy enough without also having to carry anyone else's displaced political fantasies. See S. Marino, S. Dawes, and D. Morley (2016) Media, Migration and the Borders of Fortress Europe, *Networking Knowledge MeccSA, Postgraduate Journal*, 9 (4).

77 T.J. Demos (2010) Sahara Chronicle: Video's Migrant Geography, in Biemann *Mission Reports*, pp. 179, 187.

78 Cf. the work of Giovanni Zapperi of the Ecole superieur d'art de Bourges on "narrative cartographies."

79 J.E. Lundstrom (2010) Introduction, in Biemann, *Mission Reports*, p. 11; Biemann *Mission Reports*, p. 91.

80 Biemann, *Mission Reports*, p. 85.

81 Cf. T. Pakenham (1991) *The Scramble for Africa*, Abacus.

82 Biemann, *Mission Reports* pp. 85, 89.

83 See the discussion of oceanic piracy in Chapter 9.

84 F. Schneider (2011) Towards a Theory of Borders, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im) Mobility*, NAI Publishers/SKOR, p. 114.

85 D. Petrescu (2002) The Tactics of Faux Migration, in D. Blaney (ed.), *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility*, Open Editions.

86 Petrescu, Tactics, pp. 66–67.

87 Biemann, *Mission Reports*, p. 57.

88 A. Appadurai, speaking in A. Appadurai and D. Morley (2011) Decoding, Diaspora and Disjuncture, *New Formations* 73, 46.

89 M. Bejenaru (2006) Travelling Guide, in G. Cram and D. Zyman (eds.), *Kuba: Journey Against the Current*, Thyssen Contemporary Art. Bejenaru's "Guide" was published in the form of a piece of "conceptual art" in the catalog of an exhibition about travelling on the Danube "against the current."

90 G. Kapllani (2009) *Short Border Handbook*, Portobello Books, p. 152.

91 Kapllani, *Short Border Handbook*, pp. 19; 87; 82; 102.

92 Morley, *Home Territories*, Routledge.

93 T. Garton Ash (2015) Europe's 2015 is Like 1989 All Over Again, Only in Reverse, *The Guardian* (November 30), 27.



Figure 8.1 English traditional folk dancer checks his messages, Warwick Folk Festival 2012.
Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 8.2 Orthodox priest in virtual conversation, Crete 2016. Source: Photograph courtesy of David Mason.

8

Mobile Communications and Ubiquitous Connectivity

Technologies of Transformation?

1 The Mobile Phone: Emblem of Liquid Modernity

Having discussed, in Chapter 7, the question of migrancy, both in terms of the demographic movement of populations and the somatic and experiential mobility of bodies, I turn now to the question of the movement of information and messages. This story is perhaps best condensed by means of an analysis of the cultural significance – and indeed, nowadays, the cultural centrality – of the mobile phone. Confronting, as we now do, a vast amount of material on the development of the mobile/cell phone in its different manifestations, I cannot possibly cover all the relevant materials in such a rapidly changing technological field. Rather, I will treat the phone as a heuristic device around which a variety of important debates about the culture and politics of our lives can be seen to have been condensed, concentrating on the period of its first appearance, when its novelty was all the more apparent. My fundamental aim in this chapter is, in the first place, to clarify the significance of the debates that surrounded the mobile phone at the moment of its inception initially in the rich Northwest. In my attempt to excavate these questions about both the transformative impact of the mobile phone and, conversely, how it has come to be domesticated and incorporated within contemporary cultures, my project is to some extent analogous with that of Lynn Spigel's classic study in *Make Room for TV* (if without the empirical depth and rigor of her own more detailed case study). Her work examined how television, once it had emerged as a new and potentially revolutionary technology, gradually came to be incorporated into our domestic lives and normalized. Thus, having initially been treated as creating a seismic shift in national life, over time, it became simply an accepted, constitutive part of our everyday routines: just as the mobile phone has today.¹

In the recent period, the mobile phone, along with the migrant and the container ship – the topics of the other chapters in this part of the book – has become familiar as one of the “emblematic” technologies of our age – just as the motor car, the fridge, and the television set were emblematic of the late

twentieth-century.² Of them all, it is perhaps the mobile phone that best symbolizes our “liquid” era, as the object that one must possess in order truly to belong to the new century.³ Of course, since the mid-1990s, in much of the world, it has become so very much a “taken for granted” part of social life that its significance is rendered less visible. However, as we shall see later, it is often at the point of its “naturalized” invisibility that a technology is at its most consequential.⁴

One way to understand its significance is to make a historical analogy, by considering the nature of the most important object that people of other eras carried with them everywhere. As John Agar notes, in seventeenth-century Britain, it was the (newly invented) pocket watch – which began as an expensive status symbol and only later became the routine possession of Everyman. The watch both enabled – and symbolized – its owner’s autonomous participation in what E.P. Thompson famously called the “time/work discipline” of the industrial system.⁵ Indeed, the emergence of the cheap pocket watch was the focus of a significant power struggle: until then, the measurement and control of time had been entirely the province of administrative or ecclesiastical authorities or factory owners. Just as the pocket watch was once, the mobile phone is now an iconic marker of status, enabling and symbolizing its owner’s participation in the contemporary culture.⁶

I have elsewhere addressed the significance of the phone as a symbolic object that has a comparable psychic function to the St. Christopher’s medallion worn round the necks of Christian travelers in medieval Europe: a token of safety and “belonging” in a potentially threatening environment and a new modality of homeliness, through which a reassuring sense of psychosocial domesticity is successfully maintained, if now in geographically dislocated forms.⁷ The phone certainly provides its users with a newly portable carapace of homeliness and security that helps to fend off any threatening sense of anomie. Rather than being reducible to its practical functions, the phone thus also functions as the (magical) possession that “makes everything all right”: both a talisman of order and the practical means by which people try to maintain their sense of orientation amid the chaos of an unstable world (or as David Mitchell has described it, in more quotidian terms, a “constant everyone-in-your-life-is-more-or-less-OK monitor”).⁸ Evidently, in the course of its short life, the mobile phone has already undergone various transformations, so that, for many of its users, it is now no longer simply (or even primarily) a machine for making voice contact but rather, in this era of ubiquitous computing, the umbilical connection that holds our social lives together as we navigate the informational pathways of the virtual world; without it many of us would barely know how to function, so reliant have we become on its multifunctionality. Indeed, John Naughton quotes a 2014 Ofcom study that demonstrated that the mobile device had already by then become the principal way of accessing the Internet for 80% of UK smartphone owners, even when they were at home.⁹

From Elizabeth Shove's pragmatic point of view, the mobile can simply be seen as providing a way of trying to "keep on top of things" in the context of the various forms of multitasking demanded by the "do-it-yourself society of the schedule."¹⁰

Beyond the psychosocial issues of the mobile's role in providing its user with a sense of ontological security, I will also address contemporary debates about the manner, extent, and nature of its "effects" – or the "affordances" that this technology offers to its users. In this context, I will pay particular attention to the role of mobile telephony as what has been called a "secessionary" or "capsular" technology, which both connects particular groups of its users together more closely and, at the same time, segregates them into more tightly clustered social worlds within an increasingly divided public sphere.¹¹ My further intention is to investigate, from a contextualist point of view, how the mobile phone has been developed and used differently, in cultures and places where the social, demographic, technological, and political assumptions of the rich Northwest simply do not apply. In this context, I shall be concerned to explore a range of developments in mobile phone usage which might usefully defamiliarize Western assumptions.¹² We should not mistake the particular history of telephony in Paris, New York, or Tokyo, from the introduction of the landline in the late nineteenth century onwards, for any necessary or inevitable part of the infrastructure of modernity itself. In this connection, Heather Horst and Danny Miller rightly warn against the metropolitan parochialism of the majority of studies of the mobile phone, which, being based in countries that previously had large and successful systems of landline telephony, focus on the novel aspects of mobility and individual possession that the mobile phone brings.¹³ By contrast to that perspective, we must also recognize the mobile phone's quite different significance in contexts where it is the first form of telephony with which most people in the society have been familiar at all. In such places, where the telephone appears for the very first time in its mobile form (skipping the landline phase), its implications may be, as we shall see, quite different – just as they may be in the case of its introduction to nomadic rather than sedentary, or to religious rather than secular societies.

The Powers of the Virtual: Technologies, Voices, and Publics

Among other powers, the mobile phone has been widely credited with democratic potential, insofar as it is said to facilitate the development of both many-to-many and one-to-one, horizontal communication channels that bypass political or business control. It is thus said to offer "autonomous processes of social and political mobilization that do not rely on formal politics nor depend for their framing on the mass media." However, it is important to

identify the exact nature of the much-vaunted potential political power of the mobile and the SMS messaging it enables. Manuel Castells and his colleagues are rightly skeptical about attempts to explain particular sociopolitical phenomena as the direct effects of technology. Thus, in relation to the frequent invocation of the role of the mobile phone in organizing the “People Power” demonstrations in the Philippine Islands in 2001 that brought down President Marcos, they note, crucially, that its part in creating the episode was secondary to “the existence of a relatively weak state.” Even then, they argue, the mobile did not have its effects in isolation but in articulation with older media structures: thus the church-owned broadcasting station “Radio Veritas” played a crucial role in granting legitimacy to the text message system that the protesters set up.¹⁴

In relation to the role of SMS messaging in the demonstrations in Spain in 2004, protesting at the government’s manipulation of information concerning the responsibility for the bombs on the Madrid Metro system, Castells *et al.* argue that the chain of SMS messages only worked so well because people received them from someone they knew – who had their number on their own phone’s “caller-ID” system. Thus, while the rate of diffusion of these messages was very rapid, it was the social proximity of the source of the message to the world of the receiver that gave it its credibility, enabling the creation of a political version of a “flash mob” by means of messages flowing through already established interpersonal channels of trust.¹⁵ The same point is made by Christensen, Christensen, and Jansson,¹⁶ in relation to the dangers of exaggerating the role of social networking media by young, cosmopolitan Iranian students in their protest against rigged elections in 2009. Similarly, in the reporting of the riots in many British cities in the summer of 2011, emphasis was initially given to young people’s use of social media as organizing tools; evidence subsequently pointed to the equally substantial role of “old” media, such as radio and television, as the key sources of information for the rioters as to the locations of the best opportunities for looting. There is nothing in any of these networks (Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, etc.) which “naturally” disposes them to progressive uses: the mob that misguidedly attacked the house of a hospital pediatrician, at the height of a media-driven “pedophile scare” in the United Kingdom, had organized themselves via their text message systems.¹⁷ Furthermore, the power of these systems is inevitably double-edged. Tweeting or SMS messaging is certainly a useful method for demonstrators to use when trying to organize and improvise new tactics in fast changing political circumstances. However, retrospectively, it is an even more useful device for security services wishing to map the contours of any oppositional forces. The records of exactly who retweeted whose messages to whom during a previous demonstration or protest provides an excellent guide for those whose role is to preempt trouble by arresting the previous “ringleaders” of protest on any subsequent occasion when trouble is brewing.

If we turn to the role of social media in the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, further complications arise. Thus, in relation to claims concerning the role of Facebook pages in galvanizing protestors in Cairo in February 2010, organizers of the occupation of Tahrir Square subsequently acknowledged the inevitable limitations of using this technology for political purposes in a situation where only a small percentage of the population had access to it. In this context, beyond the virtual networking involved, we also need to pay attention to more banal factors, including face-to-face gossip networks (such as those of the Cairo taxi drivers), which functioned to relay the protest organizers' message to a broader audience. It was these interpersonal gossip networks that "amplified" the significance of the Facebook connections that had initially been made between the young, well-educated activists and connected them to the broader masses of the Egyptian people, whose numbers were essential to the success of the struggle. Similarly, when it came to the critical point at which the demonstrators needed to galvanize mass participation in the protests from a broader spectrum of Cairo's population, their tactic was the very conventional one of marching through the poor areas of the city chanting popular slogans, so as to entice people to follow them physically to Tahrir Square.¹⁸ In such a situation, we need to consider the role and impact of not only the new but also the "old" media – and in Cairo, in the early period of the crisis, Egyptian state television (which was, for the majority of the poor, the main medium to which they had access) did a very effective job of pumping out pro-Mubarak propaganda. It continued to do so right up until the moment at which it was forced off air by the positively medieval tactic of people physically besieging the building from which it was broadcasting. What we see, in all these examples, is not simply the "effect" of any virtual technology in isolation but rather its forms of articulation with a variety of material circuits of communications.¹⁹

Technology and the Social

Rather than focusing on the supposed wonders of communication technologies themselves, we may be wiser to consider them in their variable cultural contexts.

"Policy" debates in development studies have long focused on the transformative potential of a variety of new technologies to solve the problems of Third World poverty. In this connection, we might think of the close parallel with Daniel Lerner's overoptimistic emphasis on using transistor radios to inculcate "modern" methods of farming in the Middle East as a potential "stimulant" to agricultural development in the 1960s. In a close parallel with the role envisaged for the mobile phone in some contemporary discussions of economic development, it was then imagined that the transistor radio was going to "cure" the Middle Eastern peasantry of its "traditionalist" biases, thus enabling them

to better imbibe “modern/scientific” ideas about the practice of agriculture. This, in turn, would usher in peace and prosperity throughout the region (and, most important of all, thus prevent Communists from coming to power on a tide of popular discontent). This was an earlier example of a communications/“modernization” policy that failed because it simply did not grasp the extent to which the “traditional” behaviors they aimed to change were so deeply embedded in other discourses and structures that simply offering “technical advice” of this kind (via whatever medium) was unlikely to be effective.²⁰

To return to the contemporary context, against ideas that the mobile phone as a technology can itself offer the key to the economic development of the Third World, as some of its proponents have recently claimed, Castells and his colleagues rightly insist that “to be effective, mobile communication technology needs to exist in concert with development in other areas of the economic and social infrastructure (e.g., better trunk roads and postal systems).”²¹ In a similar vein, Don Slater has recently critiqued the instrumentalist conception of communications technology that is dominant in the world of “development” policy. As he notes, in this world of Information and Communication Technologies For Development (“ICT4D”) the technologies are simply presumed to have identifiable essences that can be efficiently used, according to predictable models of “best practice,” so as to achieve a variety of specific goals in health/political education or in economic development.²² The problem, of course, is that in any given context, quite unintended consequences often accrue to such interventions. If we take the case of health education as one example, Thomas Tufte demonstrates that simplistic communications strategies based primarily on the use of new technologies to transmit “health advice” are quite inadequate.²³ As he shows, when problems like HIV and Aids are so entangled with poverty, culture, and gender roles, it is pointless to imagine that you can prevent an epidemic from spreading simply by providing (via whatever technology) “practical advice.”

While a broader historical perspective is crucial to any effective understanding of the place of the virtual today, it would, of course, be foolhardy to ignore the significance of the specific (and novel) affordances made available by the latest contemporary technologies.²⁴ Nonetheless, we need to beware the enchantments of the “ideologically fueled metaphysics” of the rhetorics of techno-transformation as, apart from anything else, it is not necessarily that which is “new” that is most significant.²⁵ Indeed, as noted earlier, sometimes it is only when technologies have become “naturalized” that they have their most profound effects.²⁶ Their relative invisibility then reflects the centrality of their “taken-for-granted” place in the structures of everyday life (we might think of how television antennae are now effectively “invisible” in the modern city, whereas satellite dishes are still “noticeable,” as a more novel phenomenon; or of how, in the United Kingdom, electricity pylons, having initially been hated

as ugly “blots” on the rural landscape, have, over the last century, become naturalized). In this sense, for an increasing number of people, the virtual is perhaps now best seen as a banal overlay on their material lives rather than some separate realm of wonder, having moved from the category of the extraordinary to that of the mundane, in the space of the last decade.

The key issue here is how we conceptualize the relationship between the technical and the social. In close parallel to the Actor–Network theory’s model of how social structures are often inscribed in technical processes, Castells and his fellow authors recognize that “technology does not determine society: it *is* society” and can only be “understood … as a social practice … in which its uses … are fundamentally shaped and modified by people and organizations … their interests, values, and habits.” However, they nonetheless insist that the specific nature of the technology itself can “enable, enhance, and innovate in the realm and content of communication, by extending the domain of what is feasible.” While they claim not to subscribe to a technologically determinist position, they do identify the emergence of a new “pattern of communication” linked to what they characterize as “the networking logic that defines human experience in our time.” At another point, they say that their project is to “construct an empirically grounded argument … on the shaping of this logic by users … in various cultural and institutional contexts.”²⁷ This latter formulation does, in principle, allow for the social and cultural shaping of technological developments, but it still ultimately falls back on a *deus ex machina* in the form of the “social logic” of the technology. The problem here is that this is a circular argument that effectively “reifies” a complex social process and then explains its (supposed) effects by reference to the very presumptions that have been made about its “inherent” nature. At the end of this chapter, I will return to a striking example, from Somalia, of a case where we might consider that this “networking logic” can be seen, in that particular cultural context, to work “in reverse” rather than exerting any inexorable or singular effect.

2 Impacts and Influences?

What Does the Mobile Phone Do?

The individualized mobile communications systems of our day have been claimed to have a variety of transformative effects. Here, I am also concerned with teasing out the relationships between the specific affordances of mobile telephony and changing patterns of physical mobility, in the context of the ongoing constitution of communities and modes of interaction at a distance. To take one example, Mizuku Ito and Diasuke Okabe suggest that mobile phones create new kinds of bounded places that merge infrastructures of geography and technology,²⁸ while Scott Lash argues that the mobile phone and

other “teletechnologies” allow us to now have the experience of mediated forms of “place-polygamy.”²⁹ It has also been proposed that the mobile should be understood as a “heterotechnology” – capable of “changing the nature of space and time and of inserting different potential meanings into pre-existing structures.”³⁰ To say this is to gesture towards the way in which it penetrates everyday social interactions and rituals, intersecting with existing physical spaces and social situations, becoming interwoven with daily routines, and augmenting the preexisting sociotechnical order. In doing so, the phone effectively creates new forms of technosocial public space – or even new types of persons, such as Terrades and Bona define as the *keitasha* or “mobile person.”³¹

As noted earlier, rather than the virtual dimension replacing the physical, it is now frequently a constitutive part of it – and here the mobile phone has played a key role as the medium through which “the spaces we move through and the digital information we interact with” increasingly merge.³² The combination of smart phones and ubiquitous computing has given rise to newly hybridized forms of space, where the digital converges with the physical. In this context, the issue is not so much how technology might compress the space between two points but how one of the most significant forms of “digital divide” may perhaps now be between those with and without access to the digital dimensions of the spaces through which they pass. Without such access, the latter cannot effectively navigate the virtual dimension of many of the places in which they find themselves. As Frith notes, the city streets we traverse are increasingly “augmented” (for those with the right kind of smart-phones) with layers of geo-tagged/location-based information that are literally invisible to others. This potentially creates a two-tier system, where the premium forms of information necessary for “enhanced” mobility are only accessible to some citizens. They can use their smartphones to access digital information about the physical spaces around them, or to map the locations of the fellow members of their own social networks (the better to control the potential alienating randomness of urban experience) moving through “malleable, personalized, digitally-infused streets.”³³ The difficulty for the future is that as physical environments increasingly come to be built on the presumption that the “normal” citizen (self-evidently) possesses the relevant prosthetic technologies with which to navigate their way around, those without will find their options increasingly constrained.³⁴

These technologies not only enhance and expand our range of communications, they potentially transform the relations between the private and public spheres. They also give people the opportunity to conduct a virtual form of withdrawal from public space into a solipsistic cocoon, which is, in effect, their mobile home.³⁵ These mobile devices can thus be regarded as part of a series of “capsular” or “secessionary” technologies (along with the private car, the helicopter, and the gated community) by means of which individuals develop strategies for surviving the stressful and conflictual experience of the public

sphere – an issue to which I will return later in the chapter.³⁶ I will also explore how debates about the practical “etiquette” of the use of these technologies in public settings illuminate the political significance of what has been called the “colonization” of the public sphere by private chatter. I shall also review debates about the significance of the culture of “constant presence” enabled by the mobile phone, in the light of claims that its use strengthens the ties of family and close friendships at the expense of wider networks of social connection.

At an early stage of those debates, Barry Wellman argued that one of the mobile phone’s principal effects would be to enhance the importance of interpersonal networks and correspondingly diminish the importance of place, so that “the person – not the place, household or group – becomes the principal of mode of communication.”³⁷ For Castells, the key factor is the way in which mobile communication, by offering the “individualised, distributed capacity ... to access each other and the local/global communication network from any place at any time,” creates a relentless expectation of ubiquitous and permanent “connectivity” from which it is hard for any particular individual to disconnect themselves without penalty.³⁸ From this perspective, once a certain level of use of a communications device becomes accepted as standard, those without it are, in effect, socially disabled. Thus, as Mizuko Ito puts it, in Japan “not to have a cell phone is to be walking blind, disconnected from ‘just in time’ information on where and when you are in the social networks of time and space.”³⁹

The same point is made even more strongly by Rich Ling who, following Max Weber’s notion of the “iron cage” of modernity, argues that mobile communication technology is now so “normalized” that it is increasingly presumed that other people have continual access to it. Thus, we may come to feel that we are, in effect compelled to conform to these expected technological usages, for fear of social exclusion and ignominy.⁴⁰ Thus, in their study of the mobile phone in Jamaica, Horst and Miller quote one of their respondents as declaring vehemently that nowadays “if yuh nuh have a cell phone now, him nuh a part a Jamaica ... if yuh nuh have a cellular, yuh nah move.” There is also a sense in which this compulsion can be seen to apply with particular force to the marginalized poor – who feel that their lowly status means that they need to publicly demonstrate their integration within the realm of modernity. As Horst and Miller note, “Jamaica is approaching the point at which the lack of a phone will come to signify not so much poverty as destitution” – where those too poor to have a phone will be seen as “the critical failures, the new dispossessed.”⁴¹

From Technological Effects to “Affordances”

If, for all the reasons outlined in my Introduction concerning the dangers of technological determinism, it is inappropriate to talk of the mobile phone’s “effects,” nonetheless, we might usefully discuss which kinds of cultural

patterns it might reinforce. In this context, while rejecting the idea that communications technologies have automatic consequences, John Tomlinson draws on Ian Hutchby's concept of how particular technologies offer distinctive "affordances," built into their design, which "should be regarded as properly belonging to the object" insofar as they are material aspects of the thing that at least in part, define its potential for use.⁴² Here we might also follow Elizabeth Shove in seeing these technologies as providing potential "scripts" for action.⁴³ Even if the design properties of the object cannot entirely determine its interpretations and uses, they do "have distinct and discernible ... properties" that "invite us to respond to them in particular ways."⁴⁴ Thus, Tomlinson argues that what he calls the "impatient" contemporary technologies, such as the mobile phone and the Internet, bring with them "characteristic scripts which incite expectations and attitudes of immediacy," which, while not necessarily having automatic effects, nonetheless contribute to a shift in cultural dispositions, values, and sensibilities.⁴⁵

The portability and personalization of our communications devices allow for the achievement of a sense of "telepresence," or constant contact with the key members of our social circle.⁴⁶ However, if these teletechnologies provide historically novel opportunities for constant contact, the compulsion for this kind of ontological mutual (re)affirmation is by no means specifically modern. Rather, as Tomlinson argues, these "discourses of the hearth," if now in a telemediated form, provide the conventionally phatic function of reassurance that we still do "belong," to a community, even if it is now, to some extent, a mobile one.⁴⁷ Similarly, in this connection, Ling supports Durkheim's emphasis on the role of ritual interaction in providing social cohesion, but with the proviso that those rituals now increasingly take a mediated form. He notes that copresence is now often modified by mediated interactions, as we effectively extend the temporality of "flesh meetings" by means of anticipatory and follow-up messages. Thus, mobile phone contacts are routinely used as a support to physical interactions, and relationships are often now conducted via a practice of what Ito calls "tele-nesting," whereby a steady stream of text exchange is punctuated by voice calls and face-to-face meetings.⁴⁸

Technologies of Encapsulation and Secession

Recent years have seen the rapid development of tendencies foreseen by Stephen Graham as long ago as 2001, involving individually tailored network arrangements supporting intensified mobility, providing a "personal bubble" of customized data that follows you everywhere. In parallel with the work of Lieven de Cauter on capsular and secessionary technologies, Graham argues that what we see here is a process of privatization, security, and retreat from public multifunctional open spaces to closed, monofunctional spaces where

the personalized forms of telematic communication further reinforce existing social segregations.⁴⁹ De Cauter defines encapsulation as a fear-driven response, constituting an attempt to create “defensible space” in an environment increasingly seen as potentially hostile or threatening. He describes it as tending to the production of insular identities – “the inside shutting itself off ... through ... a convergence of ... suburbanisation, individualisation technologisation, and ... a sort of internal migration: abandonment of the outside space and seclusion ... in protected enclaves.”⁵⁰ In his gloss on de Cauter’s theory, Andre Jansson explains that for de Cauter, networked media technologies offer a protective cocoon that separates their users from problematic forms of alterity.⁵¹ From this point of view, residential structures such as gated communities, modes of transport such as the private car, and modes of communication like the mobile phone all function as “cocooning technologies.” They allow the avoidance of the experience of the dilapidated spaces of the public sphere and provide a reassuring feeling of connectedness and belonging – but only with certain types of selected others.⁵²

However, democracy is necessarily an agonistic process of dealing with the difficulties of living with difference, and this capacity to withdraw from problematic forms of alterity into more controlled spaces (whether physical or psychic), inhabited only by familiar and/or like-minded others, can also have serious negative consequences. Here, in his analysis of contemporary Web-based fan cultures,

Cornell Sandvoss is also alert to the fact that, in the context of what he calls the vast “semiotic tundra” of the Web, people can just avoid what they don’t like – so fan communities often function to “encapsulate”: becoming closed communities of the like-minded. In this respect Sandvoss’ comments resonate strongly with those of Zygmunt Bauman, when he observes that “paradoxically, the widening of the range of opportunities, to promptly find ready-made ‘like minds’ ... narrows and impoverishes” rather than augments our options as part of the ongoing fragmentation of the public sphere into self-contained “sphericules.”⁵³

Connected Presence, Perpetual Contact: The Narrowing of Social Bonds?

In a similar spirit, Christian Licoppe focuses on the way in which mobile telephony makes us each perpetually accessible to friends and family in a form of “connected presence.” Participants in these mobile communications networks experience a sense of being continually “within earshot” in a form of “ambient accessibility.”⁵⁴ In parallel with this argument, Ling’s principal thesis is that this form of mobile communication favors contact with close family members or friends and colleagues, in a tightening of small-group interaction and integration, as against a broader network of social ties. This can take many forms, such as parents using the device as a kind of vicarious

umbilical cord to maintain contact with their children, or a teenage peer group in which social bonds are intensified through the ongoing, mediated gossip network. However, this may also cause conflict by contradicting the expectations of others (perhaps those of an older generation) who abide by a different etiquette. Thus, Ling notes that when the mobile phone rings, our interaction with those who are physically copresent in the situation in which we find ourselves is interrupted – somewhat in the manner of one of Garfinkel's classic experiments with "breaching" social expectations.⁵⁵ Evidently, the new forms of communication at a distance potentially create a crisis because, traditionally, social etiquette demanded that attention be paid to the persons with whom one was copresent. However, nowadays, the fact that it is one's closest friends or family members who are most likely to be ringing up (especially when "caller recognition" allows you to see that it is, indeed, them) means that they are likely to be given precedence over interaction with the relatively less well-known others with whom you might happen to be physically copresent.⁵⁶

As a result of these pressures, Ling argues, there is a tendency towards the development of more narrowly bounded forms of solidarity.⁵⁷ Similarly, with a mobile phone in our hand/bag, rather than chatting to a stranger when waiting in a bus or supermarket queue, we are much more likely to make and receive calls with already established intimates of our "psychological neighborhood" – who are now with us, in mediated form, wherever we go. There are, of course, very understandable reasons why this should be attractive to us. As Berger and Kellner noted long ago, "just as the individual's deprivation of relationship with his significant others will plunge him into anomie, so their continued presence will sustain for him that *nomos* by which he can feel at home in the world."⁵⁸ To this extent, the mobile phone functions as an "instrument of the hearth" principally concerned with the process of domestication of the public realm, the "scaling down" of diffuse social relationships into "telecocoons" of mediated intimacy. Naturally enough, the bonds between the denizens of these "full-time intimate spheres" are further consolidated by these rituals of repetitive daily interaction, at the expense of other relationships. Precisely because close friends speak so regularly on the phone, they come to know each other's daily schedules so well that they are aware of exactly the particular times of day when a friend can conveniently take calls – further synchronizing the interactive rhythms of their close-knit networks.⁵⁹

The mobile phone can thus be argued to facilitate a pattern of in-group interaction that signifies a shift to a more "Balkanized" pattern of clustering of relationships. These forms of "bounded solidarity" tend to produce an echo effect that reinforces group members' existing predispositions.⁶⁰ To shift the argument to a more explicitly (or in this case literally) political level, in some particularly conflictual situations, we can also see that secessionary pressures, which funnel people into more self-enclosed communities at a micro scale,

also operate, at a macro level, through economic, cultural, and institutional structures. Thus, to take a dramatic example from the Balkans, in Bosnia, as result of the traumatic politicization of ethnic differences, consumers, almost without exception, exclusively use mobile phone companies set up by entrepreneurs from within their own ethnic group – institutionalizing cultural divisions further through routinized patterns of separate communication networks.⁶¹ Evidently, such closed networks naturally tend to the confirmation of existing group loyalties, affections, and wisdoms. Here, we can see echoes of Roger Silverstone's concerns, in relation to the politics of broadcasting, when he argues for the ethical importance of achieving what he calls a “proper distance” in relation to others – positioning oneself neither in dismissive antagonism to those who are different nor in presumptive forms of uncritical solidarity with those whom one calls one's own.⁶²

In this context, various commentators have argued that globalized “risk societies” have broken down traditional structures of communalism and trust so that we are “condemned to individualization” as we patch together our own survival strategies. Thus, as noted earlier, Robert Putnam, Ulrich Beck, and Scott Lash have all addressed what they variously call the “loss of social capital” and/or the “individualization” of society.⁶³ However, Horst and Miller are rightly critical of the level of abstraction at which this argument is routinely conducted – which “makes the world as a whole the site of this movement from society to individualism,” arguing that, rather than being, somehow, inevitably responsible for the “loosening of social bonds,” in other contexts, technologies such as the mobile phone are being used for the “invigorating of social relations.”⁶⁴ Moreover, as Ling argues, our lives are not simply conducted at an “individualized” level, as we increasingly live among “social convoys” of friends, peers, and family who (in both embodied and mediated form) are central to our coping strategies.⁶⁵ To some extent, it might be argued that the widespread adoption of mobile phone technology has also facilitated a return to the communication patterns of preindustrial, smaller-scale communities which, by virtue of geographical contiguity, lived in a tightly integrated social network of family, friends, and neighbors. However, in their contemporary form, these village-like community networks clearly share an online/virtual territory as much as an off-line geographical one.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, we are all still local, in one way or another, and if, in its initial marketing, the mobile phone was sold as a device that could conquer distance, it now also plays a key part in many other geographically contiguous relationships. In fact, most mobile phone calls, text messages, and e-mails travel very short distances and are primarily concerned with coordinating face-to-face arrangements locally. To this extent, these technologies reinforce the ties not only of family and friendship but also of locality: over 75 percent of mobile phone calls and text messages are sent to people living within 50 kilometers of the sender.⁶⁷

3 Beyond the West

Cross-Cultural Comparative Perspectives

I want here to return to the concerns noted in my introduction about the dangers of much media theory being created solely on the basis of the experience of the populations of the rich West. As I argued there, it is crucial for us to attempt to defamiliarize those EurAmcentric presumptions if we are to develop forms of media analysis that will be applicable beyond the geographical limits of those “WEIRD” societies. By contrast to a technologically determinist approach, which would argue that the mobile phone will have similar consequences in any culture to which it is introduced, Agar argues that “mobile phones are moulded by the countries they are used in and give form to the nation in return” – a position very similar as we shall see to that taken by Horst and Miller in their study of the cell phone in Jamaica. Thus, Agar says, the mobile phone has meant very different things to people in different nations – being seen as an agent of political change in the Philippines; as a crucial instrument of economic growth and development in Asia and Africa; as “a way of rebuilding economies in Eastern Europe, an instrument of unification in Western Europe ... [and] ... a fashion statement in Japan.”⁶⁸ This is simply to recognize the varying ways in which the same technology develops in different contexts. In some cases, this is a factor of simple geographical differences – which can have profound economic consequences. Thus, in the case of the mobile phone, densely populated countries with a small landmass (e.g., Britain, Denmark, and Japan) have the advantage of it being cheaper to set up the relevant wireless infrastructure, as compared with the situation in countries like Australia or Canada, which have widely dispersed populations.⁶⁹ Here again, questions of material geography and demography remain pertinent in understanding the development of virtual forms of communication.⁷⁰

Government policies and institutional structures have led to significant variations in the development of the technology in different places. Thus, Agar notes that in the United States, the Federal Communication Commission’s decision to grant licenses on a city by city basis, with little provision for users to switch networks, meant that “cellular America” was initially very disjointed because it employed a variety of incompatible digital standards, which made it very difficult for people to use their phones outside their own geographical region. Similarly, the particular pricing structure used in America, where (unlike in Europe or Japan) the owner of the mobile phone was charged for accepting an incoming call, meant that people were reluctant to give out their mobile phone number, which had the effect of blocking its development as a medium of everyday communication.⁷¹

Beyond these questions of geography, economics, and institutional structure, I would argue, as indicated earlier, in favor of a “contextualist” approach.⁷²

Here, one dimension of contrast that bears close scrutiny concerns the differential use of mobile technology in the individualist cultures of the rich North/West as against the more collectivist the poor South/East of the world. Many scholars have noted how, in both Africa and India, there is a tendency for the mobile phone to be used more as a collective, rather than a personal instrument of communication. Certainly, there is evidence, in these cultures of a greater tendency to share handsets, whether in an informal manner (among familial or kinship networks) or on an entrepreneurial basis, where the owner of a handset literally “rents out” its use, per call, to those who cannot afford to own their own phone. Here, one sees a combination of the economic need to improvise forms of sharing, where individual ownership is not practical, with the force of cultural norms that predispose people to a more kinship-based pattern of usage of them. To take another example, in Korea, the collective use of mobile phones among friendship groups of young people is so normalized that those who fail to share their phones (or worse, lock them with passwords) are described by their peers as simply “uncool.”⁷³

By contrast, in the West, the mobile was developed in the context of a radically individualistic culture. As a “personalized” communications technology, it fitted perfectly with the structure of feeling of 1990s’ liberal market capitalism, reflecting a general shift away from centralized modes of organization towards the more “demotic” modalities of decentralized networks. More specifically, it was a technology that dovetailed neatly with the Reagan/Thatcherite politics of the 1980s, with its delegitimation of traditional social structures in favor of individual competitiveness and its emphasis on the development of modes of subjectivity such as what Nicholas Rose has called the “entrepreneurial self.”⁷⁴ In the context of the “me-decade” that was the 1990s, the mobile phone was also acclaimed as having the valuable capacity to function as a “Lazarus” machine – breathing life (or at least, economically measurable productivity) into the previously “dead” (or idle) time of travel. To this extent, the invention of this technology offered a solution to a newly defined “problem”: how to maximize personal forms of productivity for competitive advantage in the context of the enhanced levels of individualism encouraged by the political culture of the time.

Seen in this way, the mobile phone is not simply a technological object but is best understood as part of a thoroughly individualist lifestyle; and, in a sense, as Elisabeth Shove noted, it was an invention necessitated by the widespread destruction of the more secure, predictable, and stable social frameworks of previous eras. As Agar observes, it also involves a fetishistic approach to the rapid exchange of information. This is based on a vision in which “if you multiply the web by the mobile, you get universal interconnection,” and communication is associated with the idea of freedom for people “to communicate whenever they want, wherever they want,” in Nokia’s slogan – or, according to

the Orange network, to simply “say what you want, whenever you want it and wherever you want it.”⁷⁵ Here, freedom means using your (technologically enhanced) communicative abilities to announce and satisfy your desires in the most efficient manner possible, in a world where communicative “efficiency” is defined as the exchange of the maximum quantity of information in the minimum time.⁷⁶ Evidently, this is a very narrowly functionalist and instrumentalist definition of “communication” itself.

This contrast between individualist and collectivist cultures also has some bearing on cross-cultural understandings of privacy. In the emerging debates about the etiquette of mobile phone use in public places, preexisting cultural patterns exercise a considerable determining effect. To take one simple but consequential example, in more collective, sociable cultures, such as Italy or Thailand, there is far less concern about the volume (or nature) of mobile phone conversations in the public sphere than there is in societies such as those of the United States or northern Europe, traditionally more concerned with questions of privacy and personal space.⁷⁷ The degree to which talk itself is valued in a culture clearly has profound implications for how the mobile phone will be adopted, as can readily be seen if we consider the contrasting cases of Finland and Jamaica. At the risk of bolstering crude stereotypes of the “silent Finn,” it is certainly true that Finnish culture has, historically, given little status to “small talk” of any kind, tending to a respect for silence and an expectation that if silence is broken, it is because someone has something substantive to say. It is a speech culture that systematically “errs on the side of reticence,” and not only is SMS messaging usually preferred to actual conversation but, as a result, phone conversations are typically short, informative, and to the point, while users are also expected to be respectful of the potential inconvenience caused to others by the intrusion of their private conversations into public space.⁷⁸ The contrast with the situation in Jamaica could hardly be sharper – as one of Horst and Miller’s respondents puts it: “Jamaicans luv fi talk!” Indeed, the spectacular loquaciousness of the culture, the centrality of public vocal performance, and the value and status given to varieties of public “toasting” means that in Jamaica, the mobile phone entered into an already very highly developed soundscape of verbal culture. By contrast to the Finnish case, where the potential of the mobile phone was initially perceived as contradictory to the principal values of the culture, in Jamaica, the affordances provided by the mobile phone were seized on as a welcome form of augmentation and amplification of Jamaican culture’s own expressive values.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, this attention to cultural context need not lead us to ignore the specificities of the technology itself. In a nuanced attempt to capture the multiple dimensions of the issues of causality in play, Horst and Miller describe their work as a study of the dialectic between “what Jamaicans have become in the light of their use of the cell phone, and what the cell phone has become in the light of its use by Jamaicans.”⁸⁰

Technology, Tradition, and Superstition

By contrast to the intense individualism of the Western cultures in which the mobile originally developed, there is considerable evidence of how, in many Asian countries, the mobile phone has reinforced traditional structures of kinship, such as the “Cheong” “familialism” of Korean tradition. In Korea there was considerable anxiety about the capacity of mobile communications technologies to undermine these traditions, which are felt to embody the essence of Korean culture.⁸¹ However, as Kyonwong Yoon points out in her study of young people’s mobile phone use in Seoul, there is little evidence of mobile phone technology disembedding young people from established patterns of sociality. Yoon found that the mobile phone was much more frequently used for strengthening existing relationships than creating new ones: these young people’s heavily ritualized ways of using the mobile phone reinforced their sense of participation in Cheong culture. Indeed, they used the mobile to enhance the forms of collectivity which that culture values by continuously sharing information and feelings. Thus, overall, these young Koreans now “maintain local sociality, embodied in Cheong space, in a newly mediated form,” and traditional norms are reinforced through their particular take-up of the mobile phone. To this extent, much as, according to Herman Bausinger’s earlier claims, folk culture is alive and well in the world of technology, indigenous Korean traditions are being observed and updated by young Koreans through their reappropriation of global technology.⁸²

Despite ongoing attempts to police their boundaries, the realms of science and religion, folk culture, tradition, and progress have long been permeable to each other. Indeed there is a well-established historical association between new technologies and the realm of the uncanny, as instanced in Jeff Sconce’s work on the ways in which, at the point of their invention in the late nineteenth century (both in the United States and in Europe), new inventions such as the landline telephone were sometimes understood to give access not simply to the realm of the physically distant but also to the supernatural.⁸³ Similarly, mobile phones are also sometimes still seen as possessing supernatural powers precisely because they blur boundaries in time and space and between the realms of the physically present and the geographically absent; and by extension, between this world and the next.⁸⁴ The connection between these realms is more easily seen today in societies in Asia and the Middle East, where religion and superstition remain more central to everyday life, although as Sconce’s historical work demonstrates, all of this has no exclusive or intrinsic association with the Third World. Today, one can also easily find evidence of religious uses of the mobile phone in Christian Europe. For some years, Catholics have been able to download “holy protection” for their mobiles in the form of sacred “wallpaper,” showing saints of the phone user’s choice. Similarly, the Anglican church in the United Kingdom has, in the past, offered occasional “blessings”

of the mobile and laptops and mobile phones of their congregationalists, just as traditionally the Church would offer blessings to the harvest or the tools of the trade of agricultural workers.⁸⁵

Just as Sconce indicates that significant numbers of nineteenth-century Europeans believed that the telephone could help them communicate with the dead, if we turn to Muslim Indonesia, we find evidence there of panics about the “*telephon hantu*” (haunted phone).⁸⁶ Similarly, in the African case, it is well known in Lagos and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa that witches often make mischief by stealing a person’s phone SIM card and changing the call records on it so as to cause their spouse to be suspicious of their faithfulness. In many cultures, superstition still plays a strong role – thus some Chinese people will pay large sums of money for mobile phones with what are understood as “lucky” numbers and will also take their phones to the temple to be blessed.⁸⁷ Elsewhere in East Asia, the age-old tradition of burning paper replicas of all the deceased’s precious possessions on their funeral pyre is now often updated to include models of their mobile phone, which, it is assumed will be a necessity for the deceased’s successful progress through their afterlife.⁸⁸

Third World Adaptations of the Mobile: Beyond Marginality ...

Let me now return to my earlier remarks on the need to see communications technologies in a comparative, cross-cultural perspective. While many theorizations of the new media presume that they have their primary applicability in the developed world of the rich West, these technologies, as we have seen, also play vital (if different) roles elsewhere, especially in the Third World. However, as indicated earlier, in my discussion of Larkin’s work in the introduction and in Chapter 1, it is not just a question of adding some “exotic” examples of media use from “elsewhere” to leaven our Western presumptions.⁸⁹

The mobile phone has now come to have profound significance beyond the rich societies of the Northwest, in places where contemporary modernity takes new and unfamiliar forms that offer quite different potential models for the future. Moreover, as it is the residents of the fast growing slums of the Third World’s megacities who represent the largest market for mobile phones in the future, it is to those contexts that we should look, if we want to produce more widely relevant models of phone usage for the coming period. In these contexts, where there are few of the infrastructures that those in the West take for granted (landline telephones, a constant electricity supply; etc.), mobile phones are the only effective and (relatively) affordable form of communications accessible to the poor. Indeed they have become the favored means of communication of the less privileged segments of the population – thus Judith Marescal and Eugenio

Rivera go so far as to speak of mobile phones as a “pro-poor service” – and here, the dominant modes of phone use are quite different.⁹⁰

Across Africa, developments in mobile telephone banking linked to micro-financing initiatives (such the invention of “M-Pesa” phone money in Kenya or the use of prepaid airtime as a way of transferring money from place to place in Uganda) have clearly filled an enormous void, giving the majority of the rural population potential access to the formal economy for the first time. Certainly, this is still no panacea for all economic ills, not least because in the remote areas of poor countries, it is still only a small percentage of the population that has access to mobile phones. Network coverage remains patchy because the signal towers on which the phones depend rely on supplies of fuel and electricity which are both expensive and unreliable. Nonetheless, all this does open up potential access to groups of people who were previously excluded from these systems. The questions, then, are which of them perceive these opportunities as relevant to them and in what ways they take them up. This is, in part, a matter of economic priorities, which sometimes function in counterintuitive ways: among poor families, a surprisingly high priority is often given to expenditure on ICT, which will give them access to the information they see as vital to their survival.⁹¹

In this context, Burce Celik observes that in Turkey, the social group that has taken up the use of mobile phone technology with the greatest enthusiasm is the urban poor – despite its considerable expense and their own relative impoverishment. They have, she says, appropriated this technology into their struggle to produce a new kind of modern cultural identity for themselves that is quite different from the conventional form of elite secular modernization set in train by Ataturk. As she explains, these are the “unsophisticated” newcomers to urban life (recent migrants from rural Anatolia, often including Islamists and Kurds) who reside on the periphery of the official culture “in the margins of modern history, social progress and development.”⁹² They have adopted the mobile phone as an enabling device – and as a symbol of their own particular form of a “modern life-style,” which enables them to escape the designation of cultural backwardness while distinguishing themselves from the “official” secular subjectivity of the modern nation-state. This is matter of considerable pride for them: as one interviewee puts it, “We are [seen as] *kiro* [hicks or hillbillies]” but “see, we’re not that *cahil* [ignorant] as we are assumed to be. We know how to use this technology, we know which model is good, which is best.”⁹³

While all previous information and communication technologies had required their users to be literate in English, global phone manufacturers operating in Turkey quickly came to realize that there was a potentially huge market for mobile phones among the poor if they could be “glocalized” – by having their menu-operating instructions provided in Turkish, or indeed, in some cases, via a set of visual icons designed for the illiterate. In this context, one crucial part of the mobile phone’s adaptation also involved recasting it so that

it could more readily be appropriated into the cultural practices of Sunni Islam, characteristic of Turkey's urban poor. This involves breaking ICT's association with the secular forms of modernity as the phone was adapted as an agent that "technologizes" traditional Islamic practices. On this basis, mobile phones have been successfully marketed as "Islamic" because they contain ringtones alerting their users to the approach of prayer time; enable digital forms of the counting of traditional "worry beads"; provide a Mecca-focused compass guide to the correct orientation of the body during prayer; and deliver a fund of appropriate verses from the Koran for a variety of occasions.⁹⁴

As one of Celik's interviewees puts it, we "adapted the phone to our culture ... through our ways of using it." By adapting this global technology to house their own "mother tongue," they have effectively taught the phone to "speak their language." Thus, the phone enables them to more effectively produce their own narrative in their struggle for cultural recognition. In a similar spirit, Bart Barendregt reports on the enthusiastic take-up of mobile phone technology in Indonesia in the period after the fall of the Suharto regime.⁹⁵ Just as in Turkey, the new uses of technology in the Indonesian context incorporate the mobile phone into a form of cultural modernity very different from that of the individualistic, rationalist, and secularized West. Even new "trendy" practices of SMS messaging often take their stylistic models from traditional genres of well-known oral poetry and display continuing links to the worlds of the supernatural and the spiritual. If, for many Indonesians, modernity is equated with mobility and defined in terms of technological innovation, nonetheless, it remains a fundamentally Muslim culture. Thus, Barendregt points to many examples of mobile phones and media practices being "Islamized" just as they are in Turkey – most notably perhaps, in the form of a multimedia player that is popularly referred to as the "Pocket Muslim" or the "first Moslem iPod."⁹⁶ Here again, we see the phone's new users creatively appropriating mobile media within local cultural forms and practices.

To return to the Jamaican case referred to earlier, Horst and Miller begin from the point of view of the frustrations that existed in the culture prior to the arrival of the mobile (or "cellphone" as they call it). Their focus is on how the specific capacities of the technology were used to fulfil previously unrealized cultural aspirations. They argue that the crucial aspect of this is the strongly felt need in Jamaican culture – and most especially among the poor – for extensive personal networks of friends and kin who can offer help and support when it is needed. This, in Jamaican discourse, is called "link-up" – the ability to get in touch with others who can help in times of need – and this is the cultural context in which the cellphone has been adopted. Thus, low-income Jamaicans "give, exchange and receive help in a manner that seems designed to maximise communication and connectedness." As they note, this is particularly true in the case of the "most impoverished sections of the population, "living in such dire poverty that they are in an almost constant state of financial crisis" and so in frequent need of emergency funds from relatives or others

elsewhere, “in which context, the cellphone is now indispensable to them.”⁹⁷ The key factor, as Olwig notes, is how the cellphone has “fed into and reinforced local practices for the building of extensive network in which lines to as many individuals as possible are kept open.” This technology “works” so well for them precisely because it has enabled better forms of “link-up” that amplify the existing predispositions of the culture.⁹⁸

Cultural Contexts of Mobility: The Particularities of Mobile Phone Use in Nomadic Cultures

Debates about the significance of the mobile phone in the West have naturally enough been premised on the question of how it effects the lives of populations that are, on the whole, sedentary. However, it has rather different significance when introduced into the lives of nomadic populations. If, for the sedentary populations of the industrial Northwest, the mobile phone introduces new (and desirable) forms of flexibility and improvisation into their lives, for others in different circumstances, its appeal and significance can be quite the opposite. For disempowered and vulnerable populations who, through no choice of their own, are constantly on the move – displaced by war, floods, drought, or faltering economies “having a callback number and thus a fixed identity point … can be immensely valuable … as a means of keeping in touch with home communities” – and, indeed, as a means of survival in times of crisis. Given that, by definition, such populations have no access to landline telephones, the mobile phone is the only way that they can acquire the asset of “contactability”/connectivity. Jan Chipchase, a Nokia researcher, reports that among the poor of the Third World, “everyone from rickshaw drivers to prostitutes, shopkeepers, day laborers, and farmers says that their income gets a big boost when they have access to a cellphone.”⁹⁹

The conceptual issues here, while in some ways quite simple, are of fundamental importance. If we consider the case of research into the impact of new technologies on indigenous, nomadic peoples, one of the principal concerns has been that their cultures might be undermined by access to new technology. However, as Andrew Taylor points out in reviewing this research, “indigenous peoples across the world very quickly adapt and adopt specific ICTs … [and modes of transport – D.M.] … to suit their needs and in order to obtain benefits they have identified as desirable.” As he notes, in the specific case of Aboriginal people in Australia, they have long been enthusiastic about adopting and adapting European technologies such as guns and motor vehicles for hunting and gathering activities. To take a striking example, the Toyota Land Cruiser is prized among Australian Aboriginal groups for its capacities to “traverse long distances across difficult terrain and to facilitate group travel – which are particularly important considerations for aboriginal cultures, which both depend on – and indeed, require – collective, ritual visits to particular, far-off places, on special occasions.”¹⁰⁰

If we turn to the case of the nomads of the Northern Russian Tundra, research has been concerned with the transformative potential of technologies such as the snow mobile and the mobile phone. Like their Australian counterparts, these nomads have readily incorporated the mobile phone into their lifestyle and are very conscious of the advantages it offers in terms of facilitating the making of arrangements with distant others, coordinating the herding of their reindeer across the vast territories of the tundra, and staying in touch with their families and dispersed kin networks. However, in this context, Florian Sandler suggests that, whereas in sedentary societies “mobile phones may create space for a new form of nomadism freedom and flexibility,” by contrast, among nomadic pastoralists, they may well do the opposite – “tightening the grip on people’s life rhythm and reducing [their] freedom and flexibility.” There is then a sense of loss in relation to the traditional etiquette of hospitality, whereby people had the confidence that it was socially acceptable to arrive “unannounced” from great distance for a social visit. Now that there is a greater capacity to schedule and plan such visits, the previous traditions of spontaneous travel are falling into disuse.¹⁰¹

In the case of mobile phone use among Somalian nomads, many of whom are in effect displaced from their traditional homelands and pastures – these displacements represent an ongoing (and sometimes life-threatening) set of difficulties, and the mobile phone performs the same kind of “lifeline” function as it does for refugee populations. We can also see parallels here with the “risk-spreading” survival strategies of “link-up” identified by Horst and Miller in Jamaica. In his study of mobile phone usage in Somalia, Greg Collins explores the way in which people use a variety tactics of mobility and connectivity to survive their chaotic and unpredictable circumstances.¹⁰² In all of this, the mobile phone has certainly played a vital role, but it has only done so in articulation with the deep-seated culture of nomadic pastoralism that informs much of Somalian life. This cultural heritage has profoundly informed their contemporary, transnational survival strategies, which are founded on their understanding of mobile connectivity as a strategic resource for interpreting experience and guiding action – if now in newly adapted technological forms in their contemporary circumstances.¹⁰³

Thus, traditionally nomadic Somalian pastoralists used techniques of “splitting” the herd to enhance their survival prospects in a harsh desert environment, continually shifting around in search of pasture and water. In that situation, the one thing that is predictable is that disaster will strike every herdsman sooner or later – the only questions are when, where, and how: hence the importance of tactics for “insuring” against its ravages.¹⁰⁴ Today Somalians adopt comparable tactics both within the country and on a larger scale, in their modes of chain (re-)migration between countries in search of “survivable” territories. They use “risk-spreading” techniques through their involvement in large-scale networks of multiple, small-scale mutual loans and

favors, by means of which they “insure” themselves against personal disaster by maintaining ties of obligation with many others who, through this complex system of exchange, owe them favors that can be called in, if and when times become hard. In this system, these connections of liability, debt, and gratitude, between and across extended family and clan networks, constitute the underlying “safety nets” of personal survival. Sustaining them, at their widest possible range, provides a more liquid (and in their circumstances, more secure) asset than having money in one’s own bank account. In a situation of disrupted settlement patterns and enforced mobility, which makes it harder to sustain these networks on a face-to-face basis within a given locality, the mobile phone becomes the essential technology for their maintenance and repair. Indeed, the transmission of financial remittances (often in the form of phone talk credits) then serves as a form of “convertible” economic currency and these telecoms-enabled forms of connectivity cement social ties across considerable geographical distances, both within Somalia and in the diaspora.

Let me now return from this seemingly “exotic” empirical example to the broader theoretical considerations concerning the question of how to theorize the potential “effects” of any technology. In this connection, Collins’ analysis of how the mobile phone comes to be used in the specific conditions of a nomadic community provides an instance of what might perhaps be described as Castells’ “network theory” – but in reverse. For, in this case, it is clearly not simply a matter of the technology producing a “network logic” with its own ineluctable determinacy: rather, we see here, very clearly, how preexisting cultural logics serve to inform, amplify, and inflect the adoption and contemporary uses of those technologies.

4 Mobile Bodies and Mobile Technologies

The Migrant and the Mobile Phone

In concluding this chapter, I now turn to the specific role of the mobile phone in the lives of contemporary migrants in different parts of the globe, in the context of the simultaneous rise of transnational migration and of a variety of space-shrinking technologies. As noted earlier, the migrant is often positioned in theoretical discourse as enjoying a close symbiosis – or even an “elective affinity” – with the world of the new mobile communications technologies. Thus Bernal contends that the Internet is “the quintessential diasporic medium, ideally suited to allowing migrants in diverse locations to connect, share information and analysis and coordinate their activities.”¹⁰⁵

However, it is but a short (and dangerous) step from that kind of proposition – which rightly identifies an important space of investigation – to a discourse in which the nomad – with smart phone in hand – is presumed to represent the

future of all humankind, as if they were some kind of evolutionary vanguard with an epistemologically privileged perspective.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, as noted already, we should not imagine that the migrant's contemporary position is necessarily representative of a newly emerging set of norms of behavior among the world population at large. As Harm de Blij observes, not only is the migrant proportion of the world's population still very small – at around 3 percent – but it is, in fact, shrinking in relative terms as the contemporary politics of mobility increasingly dictates that "*locals* (those who are poorest, least mobile and most susceptible to the impress of place) will increasingly outnumber the fortunate *globals* to whom the world appears comparatively limitless" (original emphasis).¹⁰⁷ However, we nonetheless need to address the cumulative articulation of successive generations of information and communication technologies with newly emerging forms of long-distance migration.

In his careful analysis of the appropriation of media technologies among diasporic communities, Andreas Hepp argues that migrants are "distinguished simultaneously by their situative and biographical ... mobility ... in respect of both their mobility from day to day and over their life span."¹⁰⁸ In this respect, migrants manifest a distinctive use of a range of different media to maintain communicative connections with people in dispersed settings, and their physical mobility is closely articulated with a variety of forms of communicative mobility. It is in this context that Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller attempt to understand the constitutive role of a range of media in the contemporary experience of migration. In particular, they focus on how migrants' multisited households and left-behind families create a particular need for effective and affordable forms of long-distance communications. As a result of these needs, the global South has witnessed a boom in the development of relatively cheap forms of mobile phone telephony.¹⁰⁹

The key issue concerns what it is, exactly, that is new about all this. Demographically, we certainly see ongoing transformations of familial relationships, insofar as in some regions, as a result of migration patterns, copresent parenting is no longer necessarily the norm.¹¹⁰ In technological terms, the availability of a variety of cheap long-distance communication possibilities produce a context in which new forms of family life, involving parenting-at-a-distance, have become conceivable and acceptable. It is now possible for migrant workers to contribute to their household's welfare not simply by sending back financial remittances but also by staying involved – via these media – in quotidian matters of family welfare. These new practices now produce new forms of "connected transnational family."¹¹¹

As Madianou and Miller note, the sheer scale of change has been enormous: one respondent reports going from being able to send and receive 12 letters and cassettes tapes in one year, to sending 12 SMS messages in one day; if the phone once was "a very special instrument used for ceremonial gatherings of the family," nowadays a parent and child can text each other all night if they wish. Technologies such as the webcam have created a potential for greater

immediacy in relationships between distant grandparents and grandchildren that were previously unimaginable as the economics of these systems have been transformed from an era of scarce and expensive landlines to one of abundant and affordable mobiles.¹¹² Drawing on the work of Diminescu, Hepp and his colleagues argue that nowadays, because of their access to the Internet, mobile telephones, VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol, or Internet telephony) technologies, e-mail and social media, a whole new comprehensive communicative connectivity has been introduced into the lives of "connected migrants." Thus they argue that "their articulation of a migrant identity is deeply interwoven with and moulded by different forms of media." (my emphasis – D.M.)¹¹³

Migrants as Early Adopters: "Lifelines" and Budgetary Priorities

Migrants are often early and avid adopters and sophisticated users of the new media, contrary to popular stereotypes that cast them as either too poor or insufficiently technologically literate to be so. They use these technologies both for the purpose of researching overseas opportunities before their departure and in order to stay involved with their families while away. As a visit to the street stalls in a migrant area within any contemporary city will quickly demonstrate, such communities are often at the forefront of the mass commercial use of new long-distance communications technologies.

This is reflected in their budgetary priorities: the poor tend to spend a higher proportion of their income on telecommunication than do the rich. Certainly, for many migrants, the mobile phone is a particularly treasured possession that accounts for a considerable proportion of their income, with them spending, in some cases, up to 20 percent of their total income on mobile services.¹¹⁴ Horst and Miller argue that, far from seeing it as a peripheral expense, many of their Jamaican respondents regarded their expenditure on their cell phones as being "at the heart" of their economic survival strategies.¹¹⁵

As noted by Minu Thomas and Sun Sun Lim, working-class migrants in southern China are "so accustomed to the perpetual contact which the mobile phone enables that they spent a disproportionately large part of their salaries on mobile phone services."¹¹⁶ The Filipino and Indian live-in maids working in Singapore whom they interviewed spent between 10 and 12 percent of their overall budget on communications;¹¹⁷ they also report that, although the overall cost of phone calls was monitored closely, their respondents were also aware that "conspicuous spending" on phone calls to distant relative was sometimes a deliberate choice, because it was well understood to be also a means of demonstrating how very much the caller cared about that person. The Filipino migrants that McKay studied thus also invest a significant proportion of their small incomes on mobile phone and text services that enable them to be in contact with their families several times a day. These calls constitute a precious connection to families and

friends elsewhere, which they regard as psychically essential. In the specific case of the live-in maids of Singapore studied by Thomas and Lim, this was particularly so. Because their physical movement is restricted by the isolated living arrangements and long working hours imposed by their employers, these maids regarded their mobile phones and Internet as “lifelines” enabling them, in the interstices of their physically confined days, to temporarily “escape” their employers’ homes and connect back to their loved ones.¹¹⁸

Media Logics: Mediations, Affordances, and Propensities

Manifestly, the mobile phone is crucial to many migrants, but the question is how to conceptualize their relation to it in a way that escapes both technological determinism and what Stuart Hall once called “low flying behaviourism.”¹¹⁹ In this respect, recent debates concerning what has variously been described as “mediation” or “mediatization” have been concerned with the consequences and significance of the emergence of new ICTs. While some authors think in terms of these technological developments being driven institutionally by a singular “media logic” with inexorable consequences, Madianou and Miller are concerned with what they call the “mutual shaping of technology and social contexts,” or as they put it elsewhere, with how communications media transform social processes while being themselves socially shaped. The problem is that, as Nick Couldry rightly observes: “mediatisation tends to imply a single media logic transforming a whole social space at once.”¹²⁰ However, to return to Hutchby’s terminology, discussed earlier, to speak of technological “affordances” is simply to recognize that a given media *may* lend itself to a particular use. But that is only a propensity – and how the medium is actually used will depend on a whole range of contextual factors. Technological capacities are not to be understood as determinants of what people actually do – that will depend how these propensities are perceived and employed by particular users in specific cultural contexts.

For this same reason, Hepp is critical of mediacentric approaches that treat the mobile phone in isolation as the sole cause of subsequent “effects,” aligning his own analysis with that of Raymond Williams in respect of the relationship between a “mobile and complex society and the development of modern communication technology.” He attempts to show how “the mobile phone is appropriated alongside other … media in the process of communicative mobility.” He argues that we need to understand people’s choices from within the repertoire of communicative possibilities and technologies at their disposal – and in particular to understand why they might choose one particular medium for a particular purpose or topic when communicating with a particular type of interlocutor.¹²¹ Similarly, Orvar Lofgren notes that “faced with a range of … alternatives, we choose between different media … [for] … different tasks

and ... purposes. Does this message require an email, a postcard, a telephone call, a proper letter, or perhaps a face-to-face meeting?"¹²² This is an approach that can usefully be articulated with the classic model of communicative choice developed within sociolinguistics by Joshua Fishman in relation to researching multilingual societies: "Who speaks which language, to whom, for what purposes, in which situations?"¹²³ To that extent, to return to Herman Bausinger's terminology, we need to understand the mobile phone in terms of its place within the "media ensemble" offered by the "inconspicuous but omnipresent" communications technologies of our era.¹²⁴

Medium Specificity and Media Repertoires: "Polymedia"

Drawing on the work of Daniel Dayan, Hepp notes that "diasporic communicative spaces are articulated by the meshing of ... mass media, such as satellite television or newspapers and 'small media' like letters, personal video messages, email and social media."¹²⁵ Thus, while the characteristic "media repertoire" among the migrants studied by Hepp and his colleagues, may be marked by a distinctive ethnic content (such as the radio in the taxicab of a migrant driver playing music from their "home" country) it is also characterized by a very wide range different forms of communicative connectivity, both mass-mediated and personal, which coexist in hybrid forms, as migrants maintain different relationships and satisfy a variety of needs.¹²⁶

In this connection, Madianou and Miller's model of "polymedia" is also useful for understanding how migrants choose from the different technologies at their disposal when wanting to send a message of a particular kind.¹²⁷ The question is what kind of determination a given medium may exercise. However, the issue here is that Friedrich Kittler has argued that, as a matter of principle, in the digital age, medium specificity ceases to exist – as

the general digitalisation of channels and information erases the differences among individual media. Sound and image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects ... optical fibre networks turn formerly distinct data flows into a standardized series of digitalized numbers, so any medium can be translated into any other ... a total media link on a digital base will erase the very concept of a medium.¹²⁸

The problem is that his assertion is flatly contradicted by the empirical evidence that users of these technologies do, indeed, still express distinct preferences for using this or that medium for different purposes and modes of communication, and that they see different media as better for different purposes because of their particular qualities and capacities.

If we are to think in terms of medium specificities, we could construct a list of the special affordances (and limitations) of individual technologies. For example, it might be that some media are thought to be better, in general terms, for use in relationships involving closer or weaker ties, or for leisure, as against work purposes. The suitability of a medium for a particular purpose may be seen to depend on questions such as “privacy, discretion, needing immediate feedback, availability of the communication partner, frequency of conversations, familiarity, or the formality of the relationship, time available, quality of the exchange.”¹²⁹ Considered in this way, most media have both strengths and weaknesses: thus a “commonsensical” summary of accepted wisdoms in relation to different media would suggest that e-mail is understood to be good for transmitting information accurately but lacking in synchronicity and emotional depth; the orthography of letters may carry emotional depth, but the medium is slow; the mobile phone call is a rich medium for communicating feeling but is also intrusive and sometimes provokes unwelcome or involuntary revelations, and its synchronicity hard to arrange across distant time zones; texting/tweeting is nonintrusive and doesn’t require synchronicity, but it is a thin medium; IM (Instant Messaging) offers immediacy but is again intrusive; Facebook and similar systems are good for sharing visual experience but are hard to control in terms of access, etc.¹³⁰

Against this simplistic approach to the supposedly inherent qualities of each particular medium, Madianou and Miller’s concept of “polymedia” can be seen to derive, in part, from the structuralist proposition that identity is not constituted by the (internal) “essence” of a thing but by its differences from the other entities to which it is related. From this perspective, rather than seeking the properties of different media, the point is to understand how they are constituted through their differences, so that, as they put it, in the case of an e-mail it is “its differences from a voice call or text that ... make it what it is” insofar as e-mail is “defined relationally as ... not a letter, not a text message and not a conversation via web cam; which, in turn, is not a phone call.”¹³¹ The advantage of this perspective lies in better reflecting the situation where, in the contemporary world of convergent media, people tend to operate with a wide repertoire of alternatives, moving readily between e-mail, instant messaging, social networking, webcam, and texting. The key issue is then not that of medium specificity, in any essentialist definition, but of the place of a given element within the available “media ecology” and how users exploit the potential of the overall system of communicative affordances available to them.¹³²

However, things are more complicated than that, because the very qualities that make a given medium attractive to one party (for instance, the mothers in Madianou and Miller’s research) may be precisely what make it less attractive to others, such as their children. Thus, e-mail’s lack of synchronicity is a feature that many children prefer (although their mothers do not) – precisely because it is less intrusive and more difficult to use as a means of surveillance. Likewise,

the things that make a given medium attractive for communicating some kinds of topics on some occasions, may, on others, be exactly the reason why the same people would wish to avoid using it (e.g., lying is more difficult by video link than by e-mail). Rather than simply “bringing people closer” the space-shrinking affordances of these new technologies also “create new fields of surveillance and thereby potential conflict.” Thus, some child respondents report that these new media have made their relationships with their absent parents worse: what “good mothers” perceived as being “responsible” parenting was often perceived by their children as unwanted intrusion.¹³³

Virtual and Actual Proximities

To return to the issue of mediation/mediatization, it would seem that some of the stronger claims about the effects of communications technologies in transforming our lives according to a singular “media logic” need to be treated with caution, given the variable nature of the outcomes revealed by empirical research into their use in particular circumstances. Moreover the extent to which mediation is a new and distinctive feature of communication is itself questionable, as noted in Chapter 6. Electrical or mechanical technologies did not introduce mediation into human communication for language itself is a form of mediation, and as Lewis Mumford noted, is best conceptualized as a form of *techne* – one technology of communication among many. The problem here, as Madianou and Miller note, is that we have a tendency to see any new media as (somehow) “more” mediated than older ones – leading to a nostalgic simplification of the previous media to which we had become accustomed – which lends them a false transparency, based on our largely unconscious expertise in their use developed through our long familiarity with them.¹³⁴

There are, inevitably, dangers in raising the status of physically “being there” to that of a gold standard against which all other modes of interaction are to be assessed, which can lead us to “simplify and romanticize unmediated co-presence.” Nonetheless, as noted in my earlier discussion, in relation to Boden and Molotch’s work on the “compulsions of proximity” (at the end of Chapter 6), physical copresence remains crucial for certain important purposes. As Madianou succinctly notes, “every mediated interaction is a reminder that you can’t hug your baby at a distance” – which may well explain the frequency of mothers crying after webcam encounters – which, it turns out, often have the counterintuitive effect of making people more acutely aware of geographical distance – and nostalgic for the place where they are physically unable to be.¹³⁵

In conclusion here, I want to return to my concerns with the articulation of the virtual and material dimensions of communications and transport with which I began, in the book’s introduction, in relation to the perspective developed by Aksoy and Robins in their analysis of the multiple dimensions of

their Turkish respondents' involvements with life in both London and Istanbul through a variety of virtual and physical modes of connectivity. In this context, Madianou's example of what we might perhaps call "webcam trauma" offers an interesting correlative to Miller and Slater's suggestion that the mobile phone and other space-shrinking technologies must be considered in terms of how they articulate with the more banal and quotidian aspects of transport and physical communications to form particular "media ecologies." Thus, when they speak of the mobile phone in Trinidad as a crucial asset for impoverished families with few economic resources (insofar as it enables them to call on money from relatives abroad when needed), their point is, crucially, to consider how, in that case, the mobile phone articulates not only with international financial systems but also with local institutions, in the form of money lending – as well as the buses and taxis necessary to access them from remote areas. The point, in that instance, is to understand how effectively these various technologies work together to bring the desired object (in this case – money) speedily nearer to hand. Conversely, in the case of the mothers who are so distressed by webcam interactions with their distant children, what we see is rather the opposite – in that case, the virtual technology makes the distant child hypervisible – and in some cases unbearably so – precisely insofar as it serves to exaggerate rather than assuage the difficulties created by geographical distance.¹³⁶

Having now, in these last two chapters, considered the mobilities of persons and of information technologies, I turn lastly to the technologies enabling the mobility of objects – and more particularly commodities – in the form of containerized transport systems.

Notes

- 1 L. Spigel (1992) *Make Room for TV*, University of Chicago Press.
- 2 Cf. K. Ross (1996) *Fast Cars and Clean Bodies*, MIT Press; see also S. Yoshimi (1999) *Made in Japan, Media, Culture and Society* 21 (2) for an analysis of how the "three sacred treasures" of the Japanese emperor – (his sword, jewels, and mirror) were transformed, in the symbolic repertoire of the postwar Japanese consumer society, into the refrigerator, washing machines, and the (at that stage, black-and-white) television.
- 3 Z. Bauman (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Polity; G. Myerson (2001) *Heidegger, Habermas and the Mobile Phone*, Icon Books.
- 4 V. Mosco (2005) *The Digital Sublime*, MIT Press.
- 5 J. Agar (2003) *Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone*, Icon Books; E.P. Thompson (1967) *Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism, Past and Present* 38, 56–97; for a literary account, see also A. Tanpinar (2014) *The Time Regulation Institute*, Penguin (first published Istanbul 1962) on the symbolism of personalized time management as a measure of productivity and

“modernization” in the “underdeveloped” societies of the early twentieth century.

- 6 Myerson, *Heidegger*, pp. 3–5; Agar, *Constant Touch*, p. 106.
- 7 D. Morley (2003) What’s Home Got to do With It? *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6 (4); D. Morley (2007) *Media, Modernity and Technology*, Ch. 7 and Ch. 10.
- 8 J. Tomlinson (2001) Instant Access, *University of Copenhagen Global Media Cultures Working Paper No. 13*, p. 17; D. Mitchell (2015) It Used to be Rude Not to Answer the Phone, *Observer New Review* (January 18).
- 9 J. Naughton (2015) Mobile Internet is Now Just the Internet, *The Observer New Review* (December 27).
- 10 E. Shove (2003) *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organisation of Normality*, Berg, pp. 183–184.
- 11 S. Marvin and S. Graham (1998) *Net Effects*, Comedia; L. de Cauter (2004) *The Capsular Society: The City in an Age of Fear*, NAI Publishers.
- 12 B. Larkin (2008) *Signal and Noise*, Duke University Press.
- 13 H. Horst and D. Miller (2006) *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication*, Berg.
- 14 M. Castells, M. Fernández-Ardèvol, J.L. Qiu, and A. Sey (2007) *Mobile Communications and Society*, MIT Press, pp. 209, 191–192. For an update on Castells’ views of the political significance of networked social movements and the political significance of new communications technologies in revolutionary times, see his subsequent work, M. Castells (2015) *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, Polity Press.
- 15 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, p. 202; on this issue, see also the study of the use of Twitter in the Egyptian uprisings of 2011 in A. Nunns and N. Idle (2011) *Tweets From Tahrir*, OR Books.
- 16 A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.) (2011) Introduction, in *Online Territories: Globalisation, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, Peter Lang.
- 17 Cf. evidence of Facebook pages being used to mobilize reactionary racist pogroms against minority groups in a variety of settings.
- 18 M. Husain (2011) *How Facebook Changed the World*, BBC2, Transcript (September 5 and 15).
- 19 On these issues see M. Christensen (ed.) (2013) New Media Geographies and the Middle East, special issue, *Television and New Media* 14 (1). In terms of the important “preparatory” function of other “old” media in destabilization of the Mubarak regime, one must also note the important role played by satirical chat shows on cable television stations and by publishing initiatives such as that which produced Alaa al Aswany’s influential (or, in the view of the regime “scurrilous”) novel, *The Yacoubian Building* (American University in Cairo Press, 2004), which, both as a novel and in its later televised form, relentlessly mocked the old regime in ways that had not been seen before.

20 Cf. D. Lerner (1965) *The Passing of Traditional Society*, Free Press.

21 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*.
Nonetheless, we must recognize that the process of “uneven development” means that, in some cases, technologies develop faster in the Third World than in the rich North – witness the forms of telephone banking in Africa that far outshine anything yet developed in the North.

22 D. Slater (2013) *New Media, Development and Globalisation*, Polity Press.

23 T. Tufte (2011) Mediapolis, Human (In)Security and Citizenship in A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.), *Online Territories: Globalisation, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, Peter Lang.

24 In fact, Lerner, *Passing of Traditional Society*, makes interesting observations in the methodological notes to his research on modernity in the 1950s, which already refer to the emergence of a new form of “mobile personality.” See note 31 below.

25 Cf. J. Curran (2011) ‘Technology Foretold’ in N. Fenton (ed.), *New Media, Old News*, Sage.

26 Mosco, *The Digital Sublime*.

27 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, pp. 246, 3–4, 258.

28 M. Ito and D. Okabe (2005) Technosocial Situations, in M. Ito, D. Okabe, and M. Matsuda (eds.), *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*, MIT Press, quoted in R. Ling (2008) *New Tech, New Ties*, MIT Press, p. 4.

29 S. Lash (2002) Foreword, in U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualisation*, Sage, p. xii. See Chapter 7 for a further discussion of multilocationality in the lives of migrants.

30 Weight quoted in M. Berry and M. Hamilton (2010) *Changing Urban Spaces, Mobilities* 5 (1), 128.

31 Quoted in Berry and Hamilton, *Changing Urban Spaces*, 125. However, on a cautionary note, it is important to recognize here that this concept of the “mobile person” is perhaps not quite as new as one might suppose. Kaarle Nordenstreng has rightly pointed to the presence of the concept of the mobile person as a “new” phenomenon in the villages of the Middle East in the context of studies of economic and social development in the 1960s. Cf. K. Nordenstreng (2011) “The Fantastic Growth of Communication Research Since the 1950s – But For What?” Paper presented to 50 Years of Communication Research in Local and Global Contexts Conference, Cairo; Lerner, *Passing of Traditional Society*.

32 J. Frith (2012) Splintered Space: Hybrid Spaces and Differential Mobility, *Mobilities* 7 (1), 132.

33 Frith, *Splintered Space*, 146.

34 Cf. my earlier comments in Chapter 4 on the hazards experienced by the poor during the floods in New Orleans, lacking the prosthetic technologies necessary to deal with dangerous circumstances, which the local authority had simply presumed to be available to all citizens.

35 Cf. earlier studies of the Walkman as an enabler of a new form of acoustic solipsism: P. du Gay, S. Hall, L. James, *et al.* (1997) *Doing Cultural Studies the Making of the Sony Walkman*, Sage/Open University Press; I. Chambers (1998) *A Miniature History of the Walkman*, *New Formations* 11; M. Bull (2004) *To Each His Own Bubble*, in N. Couldry and A. McCarthy (eds.), *MediaSpaces*, Routledge.

36 L. de Cauter, quoted in A. Jansson (2011) *Cosmopolitan Capsules*, in A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.), *Online Territories: Globalisation, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, Peter Lang.

37 B. Wellman (2001) Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Networked Individualism, in L. Keeble and B. Loader (eds.), *Community Informatics*, Routledge, p. 19.

38 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, p. 248.

39 M. Ito (2003) A New Set of Rules for a Newly Wireless Society, quoted in Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, p. 173.

40 R. Ling (2014) From Ubicomp to Ubiex(pectations), in J. Servaes (ed.), *Technological Determinism and Social Change*, Lexington Books. Cf. my earlier observations on the “normalization” of the expectation that all citizens should possess certain “prosthetic” technologies – such as the motor car, in the context of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans – in this chapter and Chapter 4.

41 Horst and Miller, *Cell Phone*, pp. 159, 59–60; cf. O. Leal (1990) Popular Taste and Erudite Repertoire: The Place and Space of TV in Brasil, *Cultural Studies* 4 (1) on the particular pride taken in the ostentatious display of a “modern” TV in a poor home in Brazil.

42 Tomlinson, Instant Access, p. 143; I. Hutchby (2001) *Conversation and Technology: From the Telephone to the Internet*, Polity Press.

43 Cf. Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*.

44 Tomlinson, Instant Access, p. 132. Evidently this formulation is very much in line with Stuart Hall’s idea that, while symbolic texts do not have entirely fixed meanings, they do have identifiable structures within them which act to prioritize or “prefer” a particular interpretation of them to their audiences. Cf. D. Morley (1995) Theories of Consumption in Media Studies, in D. Miller (ed.), *The New Study of Consumption*, Routledge, pp. 296–328 on how Hall’s concept of the “preferred reading” can be applied both to the material design of technologies and to the discourses of marketing and instruction through which they are presented to their would-be consumers.

45 Tomlinson, Instant Access.

46 Tomlinson, Instant Access, pp. 132–133, 105–106.

47 Y.-F. Tuan (1996) *Cosmos and Hearth*, University of Minnesota Press; Tomlinson, Instant Access drawing on Tuan, p. 119.

48 Ling, *NewTech/New Ties*, pp. 55, 79; M. Ito (2005) Mobile Phones, Japanese Youth and the Replacement of Social Contact, in R. Ling and P. Paderson

(eds.), *Mobile Communications*, Springer, quoted in Ling, *NewTech/New Ties*, pp. 118, 127. This is often done by means of text messages that have the mainly phatic function of reassuring the addressee that their caller is “thinking of” them).

49 Cf. S. Graham (2001) The City as a Sociotechnical Process, *City* 5 (3), 341–342; M. Crang (2000) Public Space, Urban Space and Electronic Space, *Urban Studies* 37 (2); R. Skeates (1997) The Infinite City, *City* 8.

50 De Cauter, *Capsular Society*, p. 110.

51 Jansson, *Cosmopolitan Capsules*.

52 Of course, this aspect of the mobile’s function is far from new, and it can be understood as taking its place in a list of previous technologies, such as books and newspapers, which have long been used to “domesticate” public or transitional spaces by allowing their users to psychically withdraw into a separated, private realm – cf. Berry and Hamilton, *Changing Urban Spaces*; O. Lofgren (2008) Motion and Emotion, *Mobilities* 3 (3).

53 On the “agonistic” nature of democracy see C. Mouffe (1999) Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism, *Social Research* 6 (3), 745–758. On the difficulties of “living with difference” see K. Mercer (1994) *Welcome to the Jungle*, Routledge. C. Sandvoss (2011) Fans Online, in A. Christensen, C. Christensen, and A. Jansson (eds.), *Online Territories: Globalisation, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, Peter Lang. Z. Bauman quoted in Tufte, *Mediapolis*; T. Gitlin (1998) Public Sphere or Public Sphericules? in T. Liebes and J. Curran (eds.), *Media, Ritual, Identity*, Routledge (pp.168–175).

54 Licoppe quoted in Ling, *NewTech/New Ties*, p. 4; Ito and Okabe, Technological Situations quoted in R. Ling (2008) *New Tech, New Ties*, MIT Press, pp. 121, 168. J. Katz and M. Aakhus (2002) *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk Public Performance*, Cambridge University Press.

55 H. Garfinkel (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Basic Books.

56 Call screening and caller ID certainly introduce the capacity for a new form of ruthlessness in the allocation of personal time and attention: as contrasted with the traditional etiquette of the landline phone, when it was deemed potentially rude to ignore its ringing, today, for many people, picking up a phone without knowing who is on the other end of it is a quite alien concept.

57 Ling, *NewTech/New Ties*, P. 176.

58 P. Berger and H. Kellner (1964) Marriage and the Construction of Reality, *Diogenes* Vol 45 quoted in Ling, *NewTech/New Ties*, p. 180.

59 R. Rettie (2008) Mobile Phones as Network Capital, *Mobilities* 3 (2).

60 K. Gergen quoted in Ling, *NewTech/New Ties*, p. 181.

61 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, p. 6.

62 R. Silverstone, (2007) *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*, Polity Press, p. 46, drawing on Hannah Arendt.

63 R. Putnam (2001) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon and Schuster; U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) *Individualisation*, Sage; U. Beck, A. Giddens, and S. Lash (1994) *Reflexive Modernisation* Stanford University Press.

64 Horst and Miller, *Cell Phone*, p. 81.

65 Cf. Ling *New Tech/New Ties* op cit

66 Cf. K. Fox (2006) The New Garden Fence, in *The Mobile Life Report*, Carphone Warehouse.

67 J. Larsen, K.W. Axhausen, and J. Urry (2006) Geographies of Social Networks, *Mobilities* 1 (2); Z. Smoreda and F. Thomas quoted in Rettie, Mobile Phones, 294.

68 Agar, *Constant Touch*, pp. 110, 162.

69 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, p. 30.

70 Cf. Katz and Aakhus, *Perpetual Contact* for some interesting early comparative studies of the mobile phone in different cultural contexts.

71 Agar, *Constant Touch*, pp. 40–42.

72 D. Morley (2012) TV, Technology and Culture: A Contextualist Approach, *Communications Review* 15 (May).

73 Yoon, Re-traditionalising the Mobile: Young People's Sociality and Mobile Phone Use in Seoul, South Korea, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6 (3), 337. This may, in fact, partly be a function of generation – even in the West, collaborative forms of global mobile phone use can be found among peer groups of young people – A. Weilenmann and C. Larsson quoted in Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, pp. 64–65, 155.

74 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, p. 110; N. Rose (1999) *Governing the Soul; The Shaping of the Private Self*, Cambridge University Press.

75 Myerson, *Heidegger*, pp. 18, 19, 20, 25. For a critique of this banal concept of communication as simply a form of ego-driven self-expression seen J. Durham Peters *Speaking into the Air*, University of Chicago Press, 1999. For a comic rendition of the compulsion to maximize communicative efficiency see D. Eggers *The Circle*, Penguin 2013.

76 Myerson, *Heidegger*, pp. 21, 65, 55.

77 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 71.

78 Cf. J.-P. Puro (2002) Finland – a Mobile Culture, in Katz and Aakhus, *Perpetual Contact*, p. 25.

79 Karen Fog Olwig defines what she calls the Jamaican “chatscape” as involving the “fluid, mobile, multipurpose, ego-centred form of social reality, based on fragmentary informal chats negotiated by individuals in accordance with the particular life circumstances”: K. F. Olwig (2005) Commentary on H. Horst and D. Miller “From Kinship to Linkup,” *Current Anthropology* 46 (5) (December).

80 Horst and Miller, *Cell Phone*, pp. 17, 181, 7.

81 C.F. Alford *Think no Evil: Korean Values in the Age of Globalisation*, Cornell University Press, 1999.

82 Yoon, Retraditionalising the Mobile, 340. H. Bausinger (1990) *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*, Indiana University Press.

83 J. Sconce (2000) *Haunted Media*, Duke University Press.

84 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 125.

85 J. Hooper (2007) Italian Firm offers Saintly Mobiles, *The Guardian* (December 5); S. Rushton (2010) Harvesting Calmness in the Modern Age, *The Independent* (January 15).

86 On this point, cf. Sconce, *Haunted Media*; cf. B. Barendregt (2010) Sex, Cannibals and the Language of Cool: Indonesian Tales of the Phone and Modernity, *The Information Society*, 24 (3); see also M.K. Peterson (2008) The Voice of the Young: An Anthropological Perspective on Cell Phone Use Among Young Ni-Vanu in Vanuatu. MA thesis, Department of Anthropology, Copenhagen University.

87 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, pp. 72–73.

88 Cf. the work of Kurt Tong for photographic documentation of these “new tech” funerary rites – see K. Tong (2010) *In Case It Rains in Heaven*, Kehrer Books.

89 Cf. Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; see also P. Mishraj (2006) *Temptations of the West*, Picador on the limited relevance of “The West” as model for universal “development.”

90 J. Marescal and E. Rivera (2007) Mobile Communications in Mexico in the Latin American Context, *Information Technologies in International Development*, 3 (2), 41–55; G. Goggins and J. Clark (2009) Mobile Phones and Community Development, *Development in Practice*, 14 (4–5).

91 Moreover, one must also note the complicating factor that Third World uses of the mobile phone (e.g., for banking/credit transfer purposes) are now sometimes developed in more sophisticated ways than they have been thus far in the West.

92 B. Celik (2011) Cellular Telephony in Turkey: A Technology of Self-Produced Modernity, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14 (2), 148–149.

93 Celik, Cellular Telephony, 156.

94 Celik, Cellular Telephony, 157.

95 Celik, Cellular Telephony, 155; Barendregt, Sex, Cannibals.

96 Barendregt, Sex, Cannibals, pp. 161–162. In some Muslim communities in East Asia SMS messages are now an acceptable form of the *talaq*, whereby a man can divorce his wife digitally.

97 Horst and Miller, *Cell Phone*, pp. 5, 165.

98 Olwig, Commentary, 769.

99 J. Chipchase quoted in S. Corbett (2008) Can a Cellphone Help End Global Poverty? *The New York Times Magazine* (April 13).

100 A. Taylor (2012) More than Mobile: Migration and Mobility Impacts from the “Technologies of Change” for Aboriginal Communities in the Remote Northern Territory of Australia, *Mobilities* 7 (2) (May), 276, 288.

101 F. Sandler (n.d) Mobile Phone Revolution in the Tundra? Technological Change and Russian Reindeer Nomads. Available online at www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol41/stammler.pdf, p. 71 (accessed November 14, 2016).

102 G. Collins (2009) Connected: Exploring the Extraordinary Demand for Telecoms Services in Post-collapse Somalia, *Mobilities* 4 (2).

103 Collins, Connected, 210; cf. M. Glenny (2001) *McMafia: Seriously Organised Crime*, Vintage Books – on the “fit” between old Igbo traditions of long-distance trade, in previous centuries, and their adoption now of Internet scamming techniques – as in the “419” fraud business in contemporary Nigeria. For a revealing fictional account of the 419 scams, see A.T. Nwabaum (2009) *I Do Not Come To You By Chance*, Phoenix Books.

104 Collins, Connected, 219.

105 V. Bernal (2006) Diaspora, Cyberspace and Political Imagination: The Eritrean Diaspora Online, *Global Networks* 6 (2), 175.

106 Cf. G. Lukacs (1971) *History and Class Consciousness*, MIT Press. Evidently, that is an intellectual position that would replicate all the problems that ensued from Georgy Lukacs’ elevation of the supposedly inherent epistemological privileges of the proletariat in an earlier age.

107 For the statistical sources and commentary on *locals* and *globals* see H. be Blij (2009) *The Power of Place*, Oxford University Press, pp. 25, 5.

108 K. Tololyan (1991) The Nation State and its Others, *Diaspora* 1, 3; A. Hepp (2008) Communicative Mobility After the Mobile Phone: The Appropriation of Media Technology in Diasporic Communities, in M. Hartmann, P. Rossler, and J. Hoflich (eds.), *After the Mobile Phone*, Peter Lang, p. 139.

109 M. Madianou and D. Miller (2012) *Migration and New Media*, Routledge. Indeed, as the market for both mobile and smart phones becomes increasingly saturated in the rich Northwest, it now seems to many companies that the remaining profitable market is predominantly in the poor South.

110 Cf. Olwig earlier in this chapter under “Third World Adaptations of the Mobile.”

111 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, pp. 1, 10, 13.

112 Madianou and Miller *Migration and New Media*, pp. 70, 119, 108; Madianou and Miller (2012) Polymedia, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16 (2), 176. To this extent, my own previous speculations on the potential role of the mobile phone in creating forms of dislocated domesticity have been fulsomely confirmed.

113 E. Diminescu (2008) The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto, *Social Science Information*, 47 (4), 565; A. Hepp, C. Bozdag, and L. Suna (2012) Mediatised Migrants, Media Cultures and Communicative Networking in the Diaspora, in L. Fortunati, R. Perttierra, and J. Vincent

(eds.), *Migration, Diaspora and Information Technology in Global Societies*, Routledge.

114 Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, and Sey, *Mobile Communications*, 70, 85.

115 Horst and Miller, *Cell Phone*, p. 108.

116 M. Thomas and S.S. Lim (2010) Migrant Workers' Use of ICTs for Interpersonal Communication: The Experience of Female Domestic Workers in Singapore. Available online at mediathro@easaonline.org (April). See also S. Lim (2015) *Mobile Communication and the Asian Family*, Springer.

117 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, p. 109. If many of the messages they receive and transmit are principally phatic in function, designed simply to let the recipient know that the caller is thinking of them, many also now enable the economic transfers through which migrants redistribute and invest their earnings in a future to be shared with their kin and family at home at their envisaged point of return. Cf. McKay (2007) *Sending Dollars Shows Feeling*, *Mobilities* 2 (2), 185–189.

118 Thomas and Lim, Migrant Workers' Use of ICTs, pp. 5, 6, 9.

119 S. Hall (1981) Encoding and Decoding in TV Discourse, in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, and P. Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media Language*, Hutchinson.

120 S. Hjarvard (2008) The Mediatization of Society, *Nordicom Review* (February 29); M. Castells (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell; Madianou and Miller, Polymedia, 174; N. Couldry (2008) Mediatisation or Mediation, *New Media and Society* (March 10), 375. For a thoroughgoing critique of the usefulness (or otherwise) of the concepts of mediation/mediatization, see D. Deacon and J. Stanyer (2014) Mediatization: Key Concept or Cultural Bandwagon? *Media, Culture and Society* 36 (7) 1032–1044. Deacon and Stanyer raise important questions about whether the concept is in fact what they call a “pseudo-universal” insofar as it remains unclear in many versions of the argument what mediation or mediatisation is *not* and what it does not effect – or what its limits are. Thus mediation is often assumed to be an all-pervasive (and possibly unstoppable) force. To this extent, it is a perspective that presumes communications technologies themselves to be the main agents of social change and thus tends towards a mediacentric approach.

121 R. Williams, quoted in Hepp, Communicative Mobility, pp. 135–136; Hepp Communicative Mobility, pp. 142–143, 147.

122 O. Lofgren (2007) Taking Place, in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (eds.), *Geographies of Communication*, Nordicom Press, p. 301.

123 See J. Fishman (ed.) (1972) *Sociolinguistics*, Penguin.

124 Hepp, Communicative Mobility; Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*; H. Bausinger (1984) Media, Technology and Everyday Life, *Media Culture and Society* 6 (4).

125 A. Hepp (2009) Differentiation, Mediatisation and Cultural Change, in K. Lundby (ed.), *Mediatization*, Peter Lang D. Dayan (1999) Media and Diasporas, in J. Gripsrud (ed.), *TV and Common Knowledge*, Comedia/

Routledge, pp. 18–33; see also A. Sreberny and A. Mohohammadi (1994) *Small Media, Big Revolution*, University of Minnesota Press.

126 A. Hepp (2009) Localities of Diasporic Communicative Spaces, *The Communication Review* 12, 335, 344; see also A. Hepp, C. Bozdag, and L. Suna Mediatised Migrants, pp. 172–188.

127 Cf. Herman Bausinger's classic argument that media are rarely used in isolation – so we need to think of the “media ensembles” to which people have access and in which they are involved – Bausinger, Media, Technology.

128 F. Kittler (1999) *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford University Press, pp. 1–2.

129 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, p. 105; Broadbent quoted in Madianou and Miller, Polymedia, 173.

130 Madianou and Miller Polymedia.

131 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, 137; Madianou and Miller, Polymedia, 175.

132 Madianou and Miller, Polymedia, 175, 169, 171, 172; Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, pp. 139, 8. As they argue, here we need to consider carefully the preconditions (issues of availability, affordability, and media literacy) of where this “emerging environment of proliferating communicative opportunities” is “available.” While it is fairly ubiquitous in the rich Northwest, in many other places it is only a reality for restricted segments of the population.

133 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, pp. 115; Madianou and Miller, Polymedia, 182; M. Madijanou (2014), Polymedia Communication, in K. Lundby (ed.), *Mediatization of Communication*, De Gruyter, p. 338.

134 L. Mumford (1966) *The Myth of the Machine*, Harcourt Brace; Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, p. 142.

135 Madianou and Miller, *Migration and New Media*, 149; Madianou, Polymedia Communication, p. 337.

136 Horst and Miller, *Cell Phone*; D. Miller and D. Slater (2000) The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach, Berg, London.



Figure 9.1 Container boxes, Port of Los Angeles 2007. *Source:* Photograph by the author.



Figure 9.2 Container ship and cranes, Port of Los Angeles 2007. *Source:* Photograph by the author.

9

Containerization as Globalization: The Mobility of Commodities

Introduction

Previous chapters identified the migrant and the mobile or cell phone as two emblematic figures of our age; this chapter turns to a third icon: the container shipping “box,” whose very ubiquity leaves it largely unremarked and invisible to us. The container box is the key to the multimodal transport system that allows materials to be seamlessly transported across the globe, as the material basis of the dispersed production chains on which the global economy depends. The technical discussion of containerization within transport studies is placed here in the broader framework of communications theory, and we examine the analogies between containerization and digitalization as two different modalities of technical standardization. These issues are then illustrated by reference to the year-long “Box” project conducted by the BBC, in which a container box was tracked around the world online, on radio, and on television. The narrative of the box’s travails brings together many of the book’s different themes, as it centers on a multiplatform media strategy for telling the story of the multimodal transport system on which we all depend.

1 The Box that Changed the World?

Shipping Matters: The Material Infrastructure of Globalization

In contemporary theorizations of globalization, the question of maritime trade is largely neglected. This is odd, not least because in many ways, shipping has long been in the vanguard of globalization, in terms of the industry’s mode of ownership and organization.¹ Indeed it is common to find situations where ownership is so complex that a “Greek owned vessel built in Korea may be

chartered to a Danish operator, who employs Filipino seafarers hired by a Cypriot crewing agent registered in Panama, insured in the UK, to transport German-made cargo, in the name of a Swiss freight forwarder, from a Dutch port to Argentina through terminals that are concessions to port operators from Hong Kong and Australia.” Crucially, this system of “flags of convenience” (or, in the anodyne terminology of the International Chamber of Shipping, “Open Registries”) allows the owners to hire crews from where labor is cheapest, to avoid taxes, and to avoid most, if not all, forms of union restrictions on their powers.² Overall, as Rose George notes, ships are owned by citizens of the rich countries and crewed by the poor. Thus, the organization of shipboard labor is equally “globalized” as there is often a strict division between the life of the officers – many of whom are English speakers – and the life of the “ratings” below, who are mainly impoverished non-English-speaking Third World citizens, often from India or elsewhere in Asia or the Far East – especially the Philippines.³

Within communications and cultural studies, globalization is often assumed to mainly be about the movement of information and people, but it is also about the movement of goods, and by far the cheapest way to move goods across long distances is in containers, by ship. We may partly live in a virtual, electronic world, but the world’s harbors have never handled so much material as they do now. As Alan Sekula notes, in a time when everyone speaks of electronic instantaneity and the “collapse of space,” a cargo ship still takes about eight days to cross the Atlantic and about 12 to cross the Pacific, and these slow and massive movements still constitute the hidden bulk of global exchange. Sekula’s argument runs right against the commonly held view that “the computer and telecommunications are the (main) engines of the third industrial revolution.”⁴ Moreover, in an era supposedly characterized by speed, these matters are, in fact, rather more complex than that. Far from the history of shipping involving any continuous increase in rates of speed, over the last half century, the speed of cargo ships has always fluctuated relative to the price of oil, at any given moment. While in the 1960s boats of ever larger sizes were being built to go at higher speeds than before, after the oil crisis of the 1970s, it was more profitable to reduce speeds again, so as to save on oil costs. In the subsequent period, shipping speeds have continued to oscillate in relation to varying oil costs. At present, in order to save fuel costs, the very latest container ships are being built to go at slower and slower speeds, as “slow steaming” may save as much as 5–7 percent on overall costs.⁵ Thus, right at the heart of the globalizing process, some things are, in fact, slowing down. In fact, the practice of “slow streaming” means that the large modern container ships often go at only 14 knots per hour, which is slower than the tea clipper ships of the mid-nineteenth century.⁶

For Sekula the problem is that the concentration on flows of information in contemporary writing about globalization is often accompanied by erroneous beliefs and unexamined assumptions, such as the “quasi-anthropomorphic

notion that most of the world's cargo travels as people do, by air" and the belief that "email and air travel constitute the totality of global movement." This misconception then leaves the sea, across which the majority of the world's material goods still move, via maritime trade, as the "forgotten space" or the "unreported ocean."⁷ Indeed it is estimated that 90 percent of world trade is carried by container shipping, an industry which has been described as "the condition of possibility of capitalist globalisation," or more colloquially, as "globalisation's porter."⁸

All this goes to show just how very much shipping still matters. We live in an era of extreme economic interdependence, when no nation is self-sufficient and all rely on international trade – and transport – for their survival.⁹ Apart from anything else, the whole world still runs on oil – 60 percent of which still moves by ship and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, given the relative costs of moving oil by ship as against by pipeline. For exactly that reason, whoever controls the Suez and Panama canals; the Bosphorus; and the straits of Malacca, of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, or Bab el Mandeb at the mouth of the Red Sea, thereby controls the six key "chokepoints" to world oil supply. Evidently, the growth of piracy in these key areas in recent years provides further testament to their importance and to the continuing geopolitical significance of maritime trade.

As Sekula and Noel Burch put it, sea trade remains an integral component of the world-industrial system, but we are distracted from its implications by the myth that "the sea is nothing more than a ... reservoir of cultural and economic anachronisms, relics of an older, and obsolete economy – a world of decrepitude, rust and creaking cables, of the slow movement of heavy things." In fact, as they note, in today's global economy the function of the ship is

akin to that of the conveyor belt within the old, integrated ... factory: [but now] ... parts span the world, on their journey to the final assembly line. Without [the] revolution in ocean-going, cargo-handling technology, the global factory would not exist ... What began in the mid-1950s as a modest American improvement in cargo logistics has now taken on world-historic importance – in the form of container shipping.¹⁰

From Break-Bulk to Containerization

Within transport geography, it is well recognized that the striking improvements in transport speed and capacity that now enable vast quantities of material and people to be moved around the world across large distances and at low cost have been among the key driving forces of the global economy. Within the field of maritime transport, the key development has been that of the "intermodal" system based on the container box, which can be transferred efficiently from rail to road to ship, and it is these container ships (or "Box Boats") that

now dominate maritime trade. My purpose here is to explore the particular, novel “affordances” offered by this technology. However, in line with my arguments in previous chapters, critiquing technologically determinist accounts of technologies such as the mobile phone, I shall also want to set the technology’s development in the broader framework of legal, political, economic, and cultural contexts. I shall also explore, later in the chapter, the partiality and provisionality of the extent to which the process of technological standardization (of which containerization is but a part) remains inevitably incomplete and contested. Finally, I shall also explore the many other purposes to which this technology has been repurposed in different contexts.

Insofar as the extent of the market in which a product can compete is limited by the cost of transportation, containerization radically expands its geographical scale into areas where there had previously been no export trade. Indeed, as a result of containerization, transport costs, even over very long distances, typically now account for no more than 1 percent of a commodity’s retail price – a reduction in transport costs that has greatly extended global markets. In effect, containerized shipping allows products to be carried vast distances at such low cost that they can still be sold more cheaply than comparable goods made locally. As Rose George notes, “shipping is so cheap that it makes more financial sense for Scottish cod to be sent 10,000 miles to China to be filleted and then sent back to Scottish shops and restaurants than to pay Scottish filletters.”¹¹ In 1956, when the first container ship sailed from Newark to Houston, the world was full of small manufacturers selling locally; nowadays half-finished goods are shipped all round the world in ever lengthening supply chains, creating a new economic geography that makes the world system of manufacture possible.¹²

Above all, containerization offers the benefits of an integrated transport system that combines the “line-haul economies of rail … for long distances, with the efficiencies of trucks providing local pickup and delivery.”¹³ Indeed, one of the principal features of the recent period, as Jean-Paul Rodrigue and Michael Browne point out, has been the growing level of integration between maritime transport and inland freight transport systems. This integration is particularly crucial, given that inland transport costs (even though characteristically involving much shorter distances) nonetheless often account for up to 80 percent of the total costs of container transport. The result has been the emergence of long-distance corridors known as “land bridges” (in the case of North America, largely by rail freight). In the European case, Rodrigue and Browne point to the significance of the “planned Northern East–West freight corridor, spanning … [the route from] … Trans Siberia to the port of Narvik in Norway, with an oceanic leg across the Atlantic.”¹⁴

The crucial difference between the old “break-bulk” system of shipping and containerization lies in the relation of their fixed and variable costs. The old system had relatively low capital costs but very high variable costs (in the form of dock workers’ wages) whereas containerization substituted the fixed cost

of expensive capital equipment (now around 90 percent of total costs) for the costs of manual labor.¹⁵ The key difference in efficiency is that, in the previous era, ships using the old system had to spend up to half their time in port loading and unloading while containerized ships can load and unload cargo six times as fast and can thus be at sea around 80 percent of the time. Ultimately, “a ship only earns money when she’s at sea. Where costs rise is in port. The quicker you can get back to sea, the more money you can make.”¹⁶ By loading containers away from the port, rather than handling cargo on the dock one piece at a time, it is not only that the system reduces cargo transit time (sometimes pejoratively called “dwell time”), but also cargo pilferage and breakages (previously a considerable cost) are all but eliminated.¹⁷

The basic concept – a standardized container capable of being moved across different systems of transportation – is so simple that this humdrum object might barely be thought to qualify as a significant form of technological advance. The “invention” of containerized transport systems is sometimes attributed to the “hero figure” of Malcolm McLean of Sea–Land Transport, who first used containers in ports on the East Coast of North America in 1956. But containerization was not a new idea, and McLean did not invent it. He was simply the first to see that a whole new transport system could be built around the simple concept of goods being transported door-to-door, from origin to destination, across a variety of modes of transport, in a closed box, and he constructed a whole industry around this preexisting technology.¹⁸

Invisible Infrastructures and Mobile Metaphors

McLean’s key innovation was based on the simple question he first posed in 1937: “Wouldn’t it be great if a trailer could simply be lifted up and placed on a ship without its contents being touched?”¹⁹ If its impact on the global economy has been enormous, the container box itself is a totally banal object: so simple in its standardized dimensions and construction, and so ubiquitous in the contemporary world that they are almost invisible to us. As one of the characters in William Gibson’s novel *Spook Country* puts it, although he might have vaguely “read the names on individual boxes … Hanjin, Cosco, Tex, K-Line, Maersk Sealand,” nonetheless one rarely thinks about them. You just “glimpse them from freeways sometimes, an aspect of contemporary reality so common as to remain unconsidered, unquestioned” – even though we know that “almost everything … travel[s] in them now.”²⁰

The container box thus poses a complex conundrum: on the one hand, it is everywhere in our day-to-day environment, on the other, it is largely unremarked, precisely by virtue of its ubiquity. Moreover, all containers are identical in their construction – distinguished only by the icons and logos of the competing logistics and transport companies emblazoned on their sides. The boxes themselves are dull metal, and their paint is often flaking, having

been battered by the ocean's waves and winds. We cannot see inside them – they conceal from us the treasures which they carry in their enclosed darkness, where “our new things ... still encased in plastic and cardboard are sealed and unblemished – toys, electronics, white goods and clothes.”²¹ The only time we see inside the blank darkness of the container box is when spectacular accidents occur, such as that which, in 1997, pitched 62 containers of the “Tokyo Express” into the sea just off the Cornish coast. In this incident, one container became briefly famous for its contents: five million pieces of Lego, including, ironically enough in the context of this oceanic mishap, 42,000 miniature octopuses and 26,000 tiny yellow lifejackets.²²

Just as containers themselves are rarely noticed now they have become so omnipresent, so, in more general terms, the whole field of maritime freight, despite its strategic importance to the globalization process, remains largely invisible except to those who work in it. As Brian Holmes puts it, “the ease with which we ignore the very existence of ... [these] ... transport systems has everything to do with the technological unconscious, arising from the automation of large numbers of routine actions, to which we no longer pay the slightest attention.”²³ The point about the relative invisibility of containers extends to the invisibility of the transport and logistical system of distribution as a whole. Although these systems are absolutely fundamental to the organization of our lives, they also remain relatively invisible precisely because warehouses, terminals, and container parks and the other infrastructural facilities of this type tend to be sited in out of the way places on the edges and peripheries of the city where land is cheap and transport links are more effective.²⁴ In this connection, as Sukhev Sandhu has noted, “the challenge to anyone who writes about logistics or infrastructure is to show how a subject that appears so remote, impacts on the lives of the general public.”²⁵

As indicated earlier, we can understand a metaphor as a container for the transport of meanings; we can also consider the container box itself (sometimes known, in the vernacular of the transport industry, as the “can”) as having a metaphorical dimension.²⁶ Besides its practical purposes, the box also functions, metonymically, as one of the key symbols of the age to “represent” the whole process of long-distance transportation that lies at the heart of the global economy.²⁷ To this extent, we need to address not only its practical functions (or in technical terms, its “affordances”) but also its symbolic significance as a “global icon” of our era.²⁸

If Marx saw the commodity as the container of “dead labor,” and if the slave ship was perhaps the first “container ship” – functioning literally, as a floating means of transport for potential labor power – then the container box can itself perhaps be seen as the “coffin” of remote labor power performed elsewhere in dispersed long-distance production chains and delivered to market anywhere across the globe.²⁹ A number of commentators have recruited the container box to a similar status to that given by McLuhan to electronic

technologies of communication. Thus, they argue that today “the rapidity and low cost with which shipments can now be moved around the world is doing for goods and materials what the electronic media did for visual and aural representations ... McLuhan’s global village of images of information and ideas is paralleled by containerisation’s global village of goods.”³⁰

Dramatizing Globalization: BBC.co.uk/thebox³¹

In order to exemplify some of these points, I will now take as a case study a BBC project that addressed these themes and that provides us with a condensation of many of the book’s concerns in relation to communication and transport. In August 2008, the BBC sponsored and “branded” a shipping container, to which was attached a GPS transmitter, which allowed its progress to be monitored over a year as it crisscrossed the globe. The beauty of the project lay in its very simplicity: on the one hand, at a literal level, the GPS facility allowed those who followed the box’s progress on the BBC’s Web site to track it (and its changing contents) online and thus gain a vivid sense of the geographical scale and complexity of the flow of international trade. At the same time, the box functioned not simply as a vehicle for its material contents, nor just descriptively as an “object lesson” in transport geography, but also metaphorically, as a vehicle for generating a variety of detailed individual stories about the world economy and globalization, delivering multiplatform content for the BBC’s television, radio, and online audiences.³²

In effect, the project took the armchair documentary genre to a new level, whereby the online viewer was a participant in a live experiment about the geography of globalization, watching the unforeseen developments revealed by this particular case study. The capacity offered by the GPS, linked to the Web site, to track the box’s progress live, day-by-day, introduced a series of revealing “microcosmic” glimpses of the macrodynamics that determined its journeys. As Michel Callon and Bruno Latour note, even the longest journey is ultimately built out of – and is dependent on – the effective functioning of an indeterminate number of micro-linkages, and this project exposed, at various stages, the many different fragilities of these (supposedly) “global” links.³³ The slightly fortuitous element in the narrative provided by the “Box” project was that the experiment took place in remarkable circumstances: as the global economy almost collapsed during the box’s round-the-world journey, the project was able to dramatize the dynamics of global trade more effectively than can possibly have been imagined in advance by its planners.

In mid-September 2008, just as the credit crunch began to bite in the United Kingdom, the box began its journey by train from Nuneaton station in the British Midlands. It was then transferred by truck to a warehouse in Paisley, near Glasgow, where it was loaded with a consignment of 15,120 bottles of

12-year-old Chivas Regal whisky. At that stage, with their exports in the first half of 2008 having gone up by 14 percent, the Scottish whisky manufacturers were still very optimistic about their prospects, despite the overall downturn in the global economy. The next stage of the box's journey took it, again by road, to the Greenock Ocean Terminal, where it was put onto a container ship, the *Vega Stockholm*, which took it to Southampton. There it was reloaded, along with about 1500 other boxes, containing everything from German chemicals to frozen pork, onto the *MV Copenhagen Express*, whose ultimate destination was Shanghai.

The ship travelled down through the Irish Sea, across the Bay of Biscay, through the Gibraltar straits, and across the Mediterranean to the Suez Canal. This was a crucial stage of the journey, as the canal route saves the 20 days of sailing time otherwise involved in the circumnavigation of Africa. However, even as the box passed through the canal in early October, serious concerns were beginning to emerge that shipping going via this route was increasingly being threatened by Somalian pirates operating at the southern end of the Gulf of Aden. The significance of this story was well confirmed in subsequent period, in which the reemergence of piracy in this region led to a series of international crises – a subject to which I will return, later in the chapter.

The box then made its way down the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean to Singapore, arriving in mid-October. By the time the box arrived there, the global economic slowdown had cut into shipment volumes across the industry, with Singapore especially hard hit, freight rates falling to new lows, and local shipping companies seeing their share prices in freefall. Further anxieties, at this stage of the journey concerned the fact that the Malacca Straits, have, in recent years, also seen an increasing number of "ship-jackings" by hi-tech pirates. The pirates themselves make very effective use of exactly the same GPS transmitters as were installed on the box for the purposes of the BBC project – evidently, GPS itself, like any technology, is a double-edged sword, which can be used for a variety of legal and illegal purposes.

At this stage, the project also ran foul of the classic experimental dilemma whereby the experimenter's methods begin to affect the results of the study. The normal situation onboard a container boat is that the crew is largely ignorant of the specific contents of the boxes on board, or chooses to remain skeptical about their supposed contents.³⁴ However, in this case, the situation was transformed by the fact that relatives of the crew, monitoring the BBC Web site, had informed them that one of the boxes on board contained a large quantity of very high quality whisky – a revelation which the ship's captain took in good humor, although he did maintain that as a result, he would institute "extra security."

From Singapore, the box travelled up through the South China Sea, arriving, in late October at the end of a journey of 10,000 nautical miles from Greenock, at Yangshan port in Shanghai, then already one of the biggest ports on the

planet (though now exceeded in size by the terminal being built on an artificial island in the East China Sea). However, only a month after leaving Southampton, the extent of the global crisis was now becoming clearer. Within the shipping industry itself, falling demand meant that the costs of box transport had fallen by a third compared with the previous year. Moreover, within China, while companies such as Marks & Spencer had just opened their first large stores, targeting China's emerging middle class, in the hope that export sales there might support their falling profits at home, it was already clear that Chinese consumers were also reining in their spending, given their anxiety about their own financial futures (an issue dramatized by the subsequent Chinese stock market crash of Summer 2015).

In Shanghai, the box was loaded with a variety of cheap Chinese consumer goods (manufactured in a factory in nearby Ningbo) such as plastic spray bottles, digital bathroom scales, and metal measuring tapes, for sale in a chain of DIY stores in the United States. In recent years, most of China's export trade in manufactured goods has travelled in container boxes across this route, and the exporters have developed particularly close linkages with American mass retailers such as Wal-Mart, whose logistics of "just-in-time" supply mesh very effectively with the computerized inventory control systems of containerization. However, while the flow of exports from China across the Pacific to the west coast of America had been the fulcrum of global trade over the previous 10 years, by 2009, China was also experiencing the effects of the global downturn in terms of falling orders (reduced by 70 percent in some cases) for exports to the United States, Europe, and Japan. This, of course, also turned out to also have major ramifications for China's internal labor market, insofar as many of the workers in the factories making these consumer goods were migrants who had arrived in the cities during the earlier boom but were now themselves fearful of losing their jobs because of the global crisis.

A Box BeCALMED in a Global Downturn ...

Having spent approximately a month in China, the box left Shanghai in late November on a ship bound for Sendai in Japan, and then travelled on to Los Angeles, a journey of around 12 days. By the time of its arrival in Los Angeles, the world economy was in even deeper trouble, and within the shipping industry, charter rates for container ships had plummeted further. In the boom years, companies had built bigger and bigger ships in the expectation that demand for transportation was set fair to continue to increase indefinitely. However, in the context of the economic downturn, the industry now faced a crisis of oversupply. Moreover, if the port of Los Angeles had, in the late 1990s, been the crucial nexus between the emerging system of Asian mass production and American mass consumption, that relationship itself had moved into

crisis, one of the signs of which was the mountains of empty containers now growing along the port side in Los Angeles. Given that America has very little to export that Asia wants to buy, rather than send the containers back empty, they were now simply being abandoned at the port – and the long shadows cast by the mountains of empty containers brutally symbolized the crisis that had marooned them there.

From Los Angeles, the box travelled by rail across to the West Coast, via Pennsylvania, arriving in mid-December at the aptly named “Big Lots” import company on Long Island just outside New York, which has a chain of more than 1300 stores across the United States and specializes in selling cheap imported goods from the Far East to working-class American consumers. The company’s hope was that even in a collapsing market, these “good value” cheap goods would hold their own better than most. However, at this point in its journey, the economic crisis meant that the box was marooned in a container park in Trenton, New Jersey for a considerable period before acquiring a viable load for its onward journey. At the same time, the GPS tracking device fitted to the box malfunctioned and needed to be returned to England for repair. As is so often the case in stories concerning technology, it is the point at which the system breaks down that is most revealing – in this case, about the difficulties of maintaining the effective functioning of the kind of online tracking system on which the design of the BBC project was premised. The fault proved hard to repair, and for the rest of the box’s journey, the “mapping” facility on the Web site only functioned intermittently, or at best retrospectively, which deprived the project’s followers of the sense of immediacy that had contributed so much to the appeal of the project.

In fact, the box did not leave New York until late January 2009, when it was loaded with an eclectic mix of items, ranging from replacement ink cartridges for pens to spearmint flavoring and additives to polyester fiber. It arrived at the port of Santos in Brazil (the busiest container port in South America) in late February, after its 21-day journey from New York. Once again, it transpired that the box had arrived in a difficult economic situation: notwithstanding Brazil’s overall economic successes in recent years, the port had already suffered a 15 percent decrease in trade in the previous six months. The box was then “be calmed” in the Tecondi box terminal at Santos for weeks before it was able to acquire a cargo of foodstuffs for the next stage of its journey, when it left in March on the NYK *Clara* bound for Japan via the Cape of Good Hope, Singapore, and Hong Kong. When it arrived in Yokohama port, in Tokyo Bay in April, at the end of its long journey from Brazil, it was clear that the global downturn was now affecting Japan just as much as it had Brazil. However, at that point it transpired that if the flow of imported goods into Japan was slowing down, there was one thing, that the Japanese government was very keen to export – and that was the large number of Brazilian migrant workers who,

having been enticed there to work during the boom years were now quite superfluous to requirements. Indeed, it transpired that while Japan was still happy to import foodstuffs from Brazil, the government was now keen to encourage Brazilian migrant workers to go back home. Many of them were in such straitened circumstances that they had little option but to accept the Japanese government subsidies that would, in effect “reexport” them to Brazil. Revealed here, was just one of the complex forms of asynchronicity between the different “regimes of mobility” of labor and of commodities.³⁵

Such are the trials of globalization in a period of downturn. After half a century of consistent annual growth, the volume of cargo carried by container ships decreased for the first time in May 2009, during the BBC Box’s journey. While the project was planned when global trade was booming, the story of the BBC box’s journey, marooned as it was – for lack of demand – at various stages of its progress, precisely mirrored the declining fortunes of the global shipping industry. As Roland Buerk noted in his report from Shanghai, by the end, the box was looking a little battered and its paint a little faded after its long journey – a fitting symbol for the state of the global economy. Ultimately, one could say that the box told exactly the opposite story to that anticipated when the project was planned. Having been designed as an exemplary pedagogical tool to demonstrate the vibrancy of global trade, it ended up demonstrating the foolishness of the presumptions that such trade would continue untroubled into the future. Faced with a crisis of oversupply of capacity, consequent upon the optimistic orders to build more ships that had already been placed before the crisis broke, the joke was then on the container shipping industry.³⁶

In an interview that I conducted with Jeremy Hillman, the Head of the BBC’s Box project, he explained that they had wanted to “find a way to make the global economy and ... abstract things like trade imbalances or exchange-rates ‘real’ [and tangible] for people.” As he put it, the project was “a multi-platform way of involving people – with the map and the GPS tracking system – which enabled us to tell real stories from different geographical locations, but with one central theme to it [as] the box provided a narrative device to link the stories together.” His key point was that thematically

there is something to be said for being able to slow things down and take a snapshot, and it *is* still a snapshot – but of a year, rather than a week or a day ... and seeing what does that tell you? that you wouldn’t be able to find out from one trip to China ... This way, you can see the different sorts of loads ... [the box] ... carried at different stages and how things have changed over the period ... Because it is a slow-moving kind of a thing, the Box has helped to give a glimpse of some of the longer term processes in play, behind daily events.

Moreover, as he explained, in formal terms, the key issue was how the project fitted in to “365 degree”/multi-platform programming initiatives at the BBC:

One of the kernels of this idea was that it had to deliver for radio, television and online audiences and it had that “multiplatform” idea at its heart ... it was simple – how about following a container round the world, online, in real time: you can follow it on a map, you can click on your screen anytime – not just when we’re broadcasting – you can check ... in the middle of the night ... if you want to. You will be able to click and see where the box is at, where it’s on the way to. So it had that online “device” at its heart – and then, on top of that, we were able to tell the traditional, linear stories, at each of the destinations – about how the things that came in the box were manufactured, and how they fitted into the lives of their consumers when they reached their destination ... It enabled us to tell a “human story” of global trade [and also] show the actual mechanics of how the shipping industry worked – so it “delivered” on lots of different levels.³⁷

2 The Politics of Standardization

Convergence Technologies

However, beyond detailing the journalistic output and originality of the BBC project, I now want to make this “box” the grist to a rather different mill by returning to some of my earlier themes concerning the definition of the field of communication studies. The principal issues here are how we should understand the relations of transport and communications, and, more particularly, how we might reintegrate the material dimension of communications into the field, which, as I indicated earlier, presently tends to be conceived of as referring exclusively to the symbolic realm of the movement of information and messages. From the point of view of media and communications studies, one of the most interesting things about the container industry is that the transformations it has gone through since the 1960s, since the standardized container box was first invented, offer an uncannily exact “prequel” of the more recent transformations of the communications industries in the era of digitalization.

The key point about containerization in the transport industry is that, just like “convergence” media in the digital era, it is a transmodal system in which the same unit (the containerized box of a standard size and shape) can readily be moved across different systems of transportation – rail, road, or sea. To this extent, the experience of the coming of the container box in the transport

industry has clear parallels with the more recent transformation of the communications industries, once they too began to move to a transmodal, multiplatform configuration, based on a standardized form – in their case, digitalized units of information that can readily be transposed across different media platforms. It may well be that, as argued in the Chapter 8, Friedrich Kittler overstates his case when he contests that convergence media spell the end of medium specificity. His point is, nevertheless, a consequential one – and when we speak of “convergence” in media studies, we must recognize that we have much to learn from the analysis of “transmodality” in the transport industries.³⁸

Standardization as Permanent Revolution?

An important question in this context concerns the role of technical standardization in both constituting and dividing areas, regions, and territories. The struggle to establish an accepted industry standard for any technology is often long and hard fought, as can be seen by reference to the struggle over competing VHS and Betamax formats in the early days of video and, more recently, in the struggles over formats for high-definition television and DVD.³⁹ As Andrew Barry's work on the role of technical standardization in the construction markets (in Europe and elsewhere) makes clear, such seemingly technical questions are always embroiled with political and economic interests, and the resolution of the consequent disputes inevitably constitute no more than a temporary and inherently fragile moment of equilibrium.⁴⁰

In his consideration of the parallels between processes of standardization in communications and transport, John Agar notes that communications systems such as the mobile phone depend for their effective functioning not only on a whole array of fixed physical infrastructures (base stations, switching facilities, etc.) but also on fixed technical standards. As he observes, this also applies to the mobility of material goods in international trade, depending as it does on the acceptance of a single standard in containerization, and also to the Internet, which depends on the existence of standardized TCP/IP protocols.⁴¹ Just as in the case of the freight industry, where standardization was only achieved at the end of a long and complex set of struggles, Agar shows that initially the chauvinistic telecoms monopolies of the big European countries each designed their own mobile cellular systems in different ways, employing incompatible standards. However, by 1982 the European Union realized that building one European cellular phone system based on GSM standard would be an excellent way to give substance to the idea of Europe by inscribing it in this material technological system.⁴²

In a similar spirit, Matt Fuller points to the parallel between the freight container and the technology of digital “packet switching,” as what he calls

standard or “meta-objects.”⁴³ From this point of view, both entities can be seen as involving forms of protocol which organize the communications and transport processes around standardized units of an invariant nature. They both exemplify the trajectory towards standardization not simply of objects, but of processes, and the organizational systems in which they operate. One easily sees that the standardized corner fittings on all container boxes “allow” the lifting equipment to move each box in a uniform way. However, beyond that, this “standard object” itself implies then requires the provision of a particular technology – in the form of the relevant crane. As Fuller puts it, organizational grammars are, in effect, dictated by and “built into” these standard/meta-objects.⁴⁴ Thus, in the case of container transport, this fully integrated, intermodal system is one in which “every piece of equipment, from crane to forklifts to truck and vessels was designed to handle a single uniform piece of cargo – a moveable metal box.”⁴⁵

In the context of the transport industry, it was recognized as early as the 1950s that, just as Henry Ford had revolutionized motor manufacturing by standardizing the assembly process, they now had to standardize the process of handling goods and loading all goods into containers of a uniform size so that machinery could then be developed to automate the process.⁴⁶ Standards are crucial to the universal logic of interoperability across software platforms and infrastructural components. Without them, cargo containers could not transfer with such ease from ship to truck, software operating systems could not exchange data across platforms, and circuit boards could not be manufactured to fit and function in multiple computational devices.⁴⁷ The politics of standards and protocols is crucial in shaping the flow of entities (whether things messages or persons) through the networks they constitute: this is what Alexander Galloway has called “proto-political power.”⁴⁸ To this extent, “whoever sets the standard rules the world,” even if standards change and develop over time and only some of them ever become established as “universal.”⁴⁹

Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter describe containerization as the “hallmark achievement of late twentieth-century logistics,” the result of a long and fractious series of conflicts and negotiations. This is because the creation of “a smooth and homogenous technological zone in which the speed of circulation is maximized” (as Andrew Barry has observed) is notoriously difficult to achieve. Attempts to install standardized systems always meet up with the contingent difficulties of their practical application in local contexts, where any particular standard, classification, or system of measurement may itself become a source of contention and conflict.⁵⁰

Indeed, we should be cautious in our assumptions here, as the conventional account of the role of containerization in global trade can be argued to overestimate the extent to which standardization has, in fact, been achieved. Thus Martin Parker argues that despite 50 years of attempts to achieve standardization, various different sizes of container are still in use in particular

areas, deviating from the supposedly global standards of the “Forty-Foot Equivalent” and the “Twenty-Foot Equivalent” box. Even within Europe the EU’s Intermodal Loading Units initiative is still working to coordinate different locally specific transport protocols. One key issue here concerns the terminology of the measuring system, which is specifically American – and thus still given in imperial units rather than the metric measurements used in all other countries. As Parker notes, this terminology is symptomatic of the specifically American origin of containerization (in the US military’s attempt to rationalize the supply chain for the war in Vietnam). To this extent, the locally specific origins of this system have in some places militated against its universal instantiation.⁵¹

Regional Dynamics in the Global Economy

The process of standardization has involved severe difficulties (and huge investment costs) as every part of the transport system – ports, ships, cranes, storage facilities, trucks, trains – has had to be standardized. It also involved severe industrial disruption and huge social costs in terms of unemployment in the dock industries and, in effect, the death of old ports – such as London and New York – which were bypassed by custom-built “container ports” designed for this new form of trade. However, the revolutionizing of the industry containerization achieved is an ongoing process, and today, the once-accepted standards are again being transformed. Thus, the dynamics of maritime trade have led to an emphasis on building bigger and bigger ships that can move cargo round the world even more cheaply. The problem is that these behemoths now require customized facilities on a gigantic scale. The latest generation of container ships can only be unloaded in a very small number of deep water ports, just as the new generation of A380 Airbuses is only able to land at a very small number of the world’s largest airports.

If, for many years, the North Atlantic was the world’s busiest and richest trade lane, and New York and London were the capitals of world shipping, from the late 1960s onwards, as Asian countries began to manufacture vast quantities of cheap consumer goods ideal for containerized shipping, the focus of international trade moved from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Japan and the East Asian “Four Tigers,” and later, China, moved into producing for the export trade at exactly the point at which increases in the efficiency of combined rail–water transport services greatly increased access to the American markets for Asian goods. Today, most of China’s export trade in manufactured goods travels in container boxes, and half of those are produced with imported materials that are also shipped into China by container for assembly there. Though containerized shipping was an American invention, nowadays there is hardly one American company in the top 10 in the industry, which is increasingly

dominated by Asian, and particularly Chinese, companies. Just as in the 1990s, the container ports on America's west coast overtook those of the east coast in importance, now the fulcrum of world trade is steadily swinging, over time, to the Orient. To this extent, the dynamics of the contemporary maritime industry may even portend one of twentieth-century geopolitics' most long-announced prognostications: the end of the "Atlantic Era."⁵²

While, for the moment, some older ports continue to operate competitively (e.g., Rotterdam, Los Angeles, and Felixstowe), not only do around 25 percent of all containers in the world now originate in China but three of the four largest container ports in the world are in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Shenzhen – and their biggest competitor is Singapore – as these mega-ports cope better with the new behemoth ships. Following the purchase of the British Peninsular and Orient Line company by the Maktoum Sheikhs of Dubai, what was then the world's biggest port was built there in the early years of the twenty-first century (indeed, at one point, a fifth of all the world's cranes were simultaneously at work on that one site). Clearly, given my earlier comments in Chapter 5 on Dubai's prospects of soon displacing London Heathrow as the "capital" of world aviation, this combined strength in two major areas of transport gives the city an increasingly strategic position in world geopolitics.

Contradictions of Scale

By 2002 the 20 largest container ports were already handling more than 50 percent of global traffic, and this percentage continues to increase.⁵³ But the process of concentration of trade at a smaller number of centralized hubs, where economies of scale can best be achieved, itself produces a set of serious problems concerning traffic congestion, delay, and pollution that increasingly negate the advantages of this system – as witnessed daily in the largely static queues of traffic around the port of Los Angeles. Indeed, at this point the situation produces what Marc Levinson calls "diseconomies" of scale – in a situation where you "have so much cargo loading at any one time that dealing with it ... efficiently becomes a big problem."⁵⁴ Furthermore, factors such as the size and depth of the ports, canals, and strategic passages or "straits" ultimately constrain the viability of vessel sizes. These factors then limit the benefits of the economies of scale that can otherwise be achieved by the building of ever larger ships. The very largest "post-Panamax" or "post-Suezmax" container ships can only use the very largest purpose-built, offshore ports with relatively unlimited space – for example, Singapore (off the straits of Malacca, through which 30 percent of all world trade passes); Freeport (Bahamas); Salalah (Oman); Tanjung Pelapas (Malaysia); Algeciras (Spain); Marsaxlokk (Malta); Gioia Tauro, Taranto, and Cagliari (Italy). The changes in scale involved here are phenomenal. McLean's first vessel, at the advent of containerization, carried only 58 containers. The latest "Triple E" type ships will carry 18,000

containers, and shipping lines strive to build larger and larger ships to achieve even greater economies of scale – which puts increasing pressure on ports to increase their size to accommodate them, so the trend is set to continue. Already the “Triple E” ships are too big for most of the world’s ports (including all those in North and South America) and too big for the Panama Canal (hence the current Chinese initiative to build a new, much larger canal through Nicaragua). They can just about squeeze through the Suez Canal (itself widened in 2015) and the Malacca Straits, and there are a few European ports that can handle them, but plans already exist for even bigger ships – for which the British and Belgian governments are busy investing in further mega-ports (London Gateway and Antwerp), dwarfing Felixstowe and Rotterdam’s existing scales.⁵⁵

Technological Innovation and Regulatory Contexts

If the analysis of technical forms of standardization benefits from consideration of these parallels between different industries’ experiences of the same basic processes, a further issue concerns the relation between technological innovation and the changes in regulatory contexts that make particular technologies both feasible and (potentially) profitable. Within transport studies, the story of containerization is sometimes constructed as a matter of technological determinism – in which, as noted earlier, this “invention” is held to have “changed the world.” However, the crucial issue was not simply the invention of the box itself but rather the new context provided for that invention by the deregulation of the transport industries (especially in the United States, initially), which increasingly allowed cross-industry forms of ownership that had previously been outlawed under monopoly legislation. It was not the container box alone, as a particular technological innovation, that created globalization. Rather, it was the development of multilateral trade frameworks such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, designed to lower trade barriers across the globe, that created the deregulated context in which containerization became viable as the technology at the base of the freight transportation system. This then did transform the global economy.⁵⁶

If today, transmodal transport systems are established all over the world, in the United States, where the containerization revolution began, freight transportation had always been heavily regulated by the Interstate Commerce Commission, which was set up to define and police the boundaries that separate rail, truck, and water transportation. Each of these modes of transportation was to concentrate on providing the services for which it was best suited. To this extent “in transportation, ‘modalism’ became the industrial equivalent of nationalism in international politics,” and the ICC saw an important part of its antimonopoly role as blocking emergent ownership structures that attempted to straddle different modes of transport. However, McLean

famously saw the ship as “just another piece of highway to transport goods on” and regarded the regulatory roadblocks that then separated different transportation modes merely as temporary obstacles to be overcome. Nonetheless, these obstacles stood for a considerable time, until the final deregulation of the American transport industries in the Reagan years. It was not until 1980s that the Commission’s regulatory grip on the transport industries was decisively loosened.⁵⁷

The parallels are clear with our concerns in media and communication studies with how the deregulation of the media industries in the United Kingdom in the 1980s paved the way for the development of digitalized “convergence” technologies. That process of deregulation permitted forms of cross-media ownership that would previously have been outlawed by anti-monopoly legislation. Without that transformation, the “economies of scope” now available to multimedia companies (to redeploy the same content across a variety of media platforms) would simply have been illegal, whether or not the technology necessary for the task was available. In short, what is needed here is a more complex model of the dynamics of the interactions between technical innovation, invention, and implementation in the broader context of the role of regulatory structures in setting parameters to what technologies can be profitably developed at a given moment.⁵⁸ Only then can the significance of both digitalization and containerization be fully understood.

3 Contradictions of Containerization

From Transport to Logistics

In his discussion of the role of containerized transport and “just-in-time” delivery systems in transforming the system of global trade, Brian Holmes argues that Urry’s analysis of mobility systems (discussed in Chapter 3) is vitiated by its omission of logistics. That discipline has been defined as “the managerial science of temporal and spatial control,” whose techniques of fast-tracking and quick response provide “the crucial hinge between … warehousing and just-in-time deliveries around the world.”⁵⁹ This is, in effect, the “distributional machinery of intermodal transport” along with its “associated representational and communicational … techniques,” which is arguably the major mobility system of our time. As he indicates, intermodal transport is based on three key foundations: “rigorous standardisation of the box allowing for “stackability” in ships and transfer by specialized cranes to truck or rail; continuous traceability … [via the]… machine-readable bill of lading; and finally the ability to lock a shipment from initial departure to final destination.” As he notes, the containerization system, based on these principles, has not only slashed freight costs but has also made “logistics the key operating discipline” of the global economy.

The crucial issue is the way in which the advent of containerization turned the “just-in-time” production system into the basic principle of the global supply chain. The vast delivery system commanded by “Big Box” retailers is now driven by the logistics of the new science of “supply chain management,” in which the effective coordination of these informational, material, and financial flows becomes “the major determinant of competitive success.”⁶⁰

By the start of the twenty-first century, US containerized imports were dominated by mass retailers such as Wal-Mart that had turned to China as the source for much of their merchandise. The symbiosis between these “Big Box” retailers and containerization lies in their mutual reliance on highly efficient logistics. A company like Wal-Mart, whose growth has depended on rigorous inventory control, used containerized transport systems to track and move goods through their supply chain so quickly that they were able to sell inventory almost most before paying their suppliers.⁶¹ In this context, as Wim Nijenhuis notes, “the focus is no longer on increases in mechanical speed” but on “the reduction of delays in the sites of transfer and transit [across] the multimodal platforms.”⁶² Logistics, defined as a science of physical distribution, is concerned to establish “the set of operations required for goods to be made available … [at] specific destinations” and if transport was traditionally regarded as “a tool for overcoming space,” logistics is critical in terms of time-management.⁶³ To this extent, the discipline of logistics now becomes the key site for further innovation and profitability.

While I began this chapter by emphasizing the continuing effectivities of the material means of transport and communications in the process of globalization, one must also give due recognition to the significance of the virtual realm – and this applies on the docks just as much as anywhere else.⁶⁴ It is not simply “the box” as a physical object that has transformed the docks but rather the box in combination with the computerization of the loading and unloading procedures. The efficiency of the containerization system depends on the articulation of the material form of the “box” with the computerized system that continually recalculates the most effective sequence in which to orchestrate the movement of the boxes. It is the computerization of unloading procedures for the processing of each container by the dockside cranes that has reduced port turnaround times so dramatically.

If logistics involves the minimization of cost, and container shipping requires an automated way for a carrier to track its boxes and determine the costs of routing them, all this depends on computerization. Thus, as Rodrigue notes, “at the heart of modern intermodalism are data handling, processing and distribution systems … [which] ensure the safe, reliable and cost effective control of freight movements across different modes of transport.”⁶⁵ Because each container carries a unique identification code, the use of computerized procedures allows its position to be tracked throughout its journey so as to ensure a reliable delivery service. It is the confidence created by these logistical procedures that creates the possibility of the “just-in-time” restocking

policies that have been so important in the reduction of the warehousing costs of holding “buffer” stocks, in favor of “lean management” strategies that replace inventory with supply-on-demand materials. The continual flow of goods is thus dependent on computerized container technologies as it seamlessly “conjugates the maritime, the landed, the railway and the airborne to maximum effectiveness.”⁶⁶ In a world of geographically extended production processes, where reliable and timely deliveries are as important as costs, the process of containerization has been greatly enhanced by the growth of maritime logistics with its integration of intermodal, economic, and organizational forms in the provision of door-to-door services.⁶⁷ To this extent Paul Virilio argues that we are moving “from a revolution in transport to one in loading” as part of this logistical revolution.⁶⁸

Piracy and Preemptive Securitization

If “the primary task of the logistics industry is to manage the efficient movement of people and things through the application of technologies of measure, such as the database and spreadsheet,”⁶⁹ then the crucial issue concerns the capacity of logistics to effectively manage disruptions and failures of isolated components within the system, so as to avoid crises. As Neilson and Rossiter note, any logistical system involves a “geography of calculation” designed to make all movement within the relevant system visible, knowable, and therefore manageable.⁷⁰ In this respect, if the crucial “logistical moment” occurs in port, where software protocols dictate the most efficient patterns for loading and unloading containers, there is also “the constant monitoring of ship movements at sea which ... coordinate(s) steaming speeds and routes with the availability of port berths” as radio frequency identification technologies track the geographical position of ships and goods.⁷¹

Problematic eventualities (whether an unanticipated bout of bad weather; a miscalculation in the loading process; a spillage of problematic materials on board; or a pirate boat spotted on the horizon) inevitably arise, and they must be preempted if the coordination of the supply chain is to be kept in balance. In this respect, Neilson and Rossiter point to the proliferation of “securitization” methods for managing risk. This produces a situation in which the logistics industries exist in a “state of continual alertness” in which their response to the uncertainties of their operating environment is a policy of “speculative preemption” of all possible threats.⁷² It is in the light of these problematic considerations that by 2008, in his follow-up article to his influential book on “The Box” (initially published in 2006), Mark Levinson was already warning of a growing sense of what he called “freight pain” – signaling a possible retreat from globalization among some North American companies driven by post-9/11 security concerns over the diminishing reliability of long-distance supply chains. As he noted then, some US companies were

already reducing their exposure to uncertainty by relying on shorter supply chains, based on production in countries such as Mexico and Central America rather than East Asia.⁷³

To return to an issue noted in passing in my commentary on the BBC Box project, recent years saw a boom in piracy to a level comparable to that of the early eighteenth century. The scale of this activity is huge: with 42,000 commercial ships travelling through the waters off the Somalian coast annually, it has been estimated that piracy cost the world economy £4.3 billion in 2012. The pirates' activities have rewritten the economic model of the shipping industry as it has become increasingly necessary to take on armed guards to protect the vessels or else reroute them and sail only through the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), a 492-mile dual lane sea highway that skirts Yemen's southern coast, to avoid the pirate areas. As a result, the cost of insuring ships passing through the Gulf of Aden increased to the extent that some shipping companies began to consider taking the long route around Africa, via the Cape of Good Hope, rather than run these risks.⁷⁴

The pirates call themselves the "saviors of the sea" and regard themselves as the descendants of piracy's golden age. Beset by civil war, poverty, and famine and unable to compete with modern fishing vessels from richer nations, the pirates themselves claim that their present activities are simply a result of the ongoing violation of Somali waters by foreign trawlers consequent upon the collapse of the state in Somalia. They argue that all this has made their traditional fishing activities impossible – and they claim that it is only in response to this threat to their way of life that they have taken to piracy and nowadays go in search of bigger fish.⁷⁵ As the average lifetime earnings of a Somali are only around £9000, engaging in piracy can, in this context, be seen as a perfectly rational economic choice since, in one attack on a ship, an individual might earn double that amount of money, thereby justifying to himself the serious risks he takes. To this extent, Somali piracy can simply be regarded as a business in which foreign shipping is effectively "taxed" (or charged a ransom fee) for its safe passage. Indeed, the pirates can be seen as rational economic actors following understandable business norms in their conduct of these "market-dependent" crimes. Given that the average profit margin for piracy in 2010 was around 25 to 30 percent, the pirates can be seen as symbolizing the very essence of rational profit maximizing entrepreneurship, as described in classical economics, and it was for this reason that the Harvard Business School chose Somali piracy as "business model of the year" in 2010.⁷⁶

The Circulation of Goods and Bads

In the end, it is in any case, insufficient to speak only of those uses of the box that conform to the intentions of its designers. As we well know, the box, like any other technology, is capable of being used in a multiplicity of ways. In his

critique of the conventional account of containerization, Martin Parker troubles the neatness of the usual story of the box as “neatly stacked in an account of seamless movement and exchange” and argues against the reduction of mobility to a “determinist account of technology” allied to a “teleological version of history.” While that history offers an account of rationalization and standardization “based on the interchangability of people, parts and processes” in an increasingly “flat world” it can also be read as an ideological morality tale. That story (whether explicitly or implicitly) extols the virtues of deregulation “freeing” the market to use technologies in the service of “rational and efficient” forms of organization – but usually without addressing the crucial question of who it is that exercises power in the very definition of those terms.⁷⁷

Parker follows Urry in recognizing that containerization, like any mobility system, can produce complex and paradoxical effects, in which “its sameness makes difference, its security manufactures danger and its plenty produces emptiness.” So, just as steel produces rust “so the can becomes uncanny.” The container box may usually be associated with the qualities of similarity, security, and plentifullness, but is in fact also associated with difference, danger, and emptiness. Even in terms of their materiality “they are not all the same, shiny, busy boxes … on the move … but varied, always decayed and just as often, static and surrounded by weeds.”⁷⁸

The ideologists of globalization generate a utopian discourse in which technical advances are presumed to have (widely distributed) social benefits, and it is held that “because containerisation empowers world trade, it promotes world peace” and is “an industry which is helping to bring the world closer together and hopefully closer to world peace as nations become interdependent.”⁷⁹ However, as Parker notes, the box is not only a functional element in a standardized system of mobility in which “market economics combines with sameness and security to produce plenty.” If a sealed box is secure from dock-side pilfering, the same “efficiencies which make it such an effective instrument of international trade also make it a major threat to national security” insofar as “sealing the container brings with it … the possibility of hiding things.”⁸⁰ Thus, if containerization enhances the flow of goods, it also produces considerable security risks. As one security expert noted, “the system that underpins the incredibly efficient, reliable and affordable movement of global freight has one glaring shortcoming in the post 9/11 world. It was built without credible safeguards to prevent it from being exploited or targeted by terrorists and criminals.”⁸¹ As we shall see later, only a very small percentage of container boxes can, by definition, ever be checked, without impeding movement of trade to a point where the system breaks down, and at present that figure is estimated to be as low as 5 percent worldwide.⁸² Each moment of delay imposes severe economic costs, and as McLean insisted, “port-time” being expensive, profitability demands its reduction to the barest minimum. Thus, the importance of unimpeded speeds of flow throughout the transhipment process

means that it is now correspondingly difficult to guarantee security against any form of smuggling of dangerous and unwanted cargoes.⁸³ In the case of the Los Angeles/Long Beach port in the United States, it has been established that 35,000 customs officers would be needed if each of the containers arriving every day were to be checked.⁸⁴

Reporting on her own experience of a six-week trip on a container ship, the journalist Rose George is extremely skeptical about the effects of any security systems in relation to tracking the use of containers for smuggling purposes. She recounts that on her journey, only a minuscule proportion of the containers were ever seriously scrutinized at the point at which they passed through a port. One of the things she found curious was that the crew on these ships evinced little curiosity as to what the cargo might be – so far as they are concerned, they are just all “boxes” and her sense was that the crew just mentally “delete” the particularity of their contents. It is only in exceptional circumstances, for instance when some dangerous condition of leakage is suspected, that the contents of the boxes are of concern to anyone. She also reported, as an interesting linguistic index of the degree of “suspension of (dis)belief” about the contents of any particular box that, in routine usage, no one refers to what a box contains but only to what a box is “said to contain” – a usage which is evidently pronounced with something of an ironic tone. The useful ambiguity of this “said to ...” terminology is also replicated in the legal documents of the ships’ manifests.⁸⁵

In his analysis of the hidden underside of the system of containerization, and the various forms of subversion that occur when boxes rust, doors, jam locks seize, and customs seals are removed surreptitiously, Craig Martin follows the logic of Michel de Certeau’s canonical distinction between the strategies employed by those who set up and administer powerful systems of control and the tactics employed by those who will inevitably attempt to subvert and evade them. In this case, Martin demonstrates how criminals and smugglers effectively develop their own illicit forms of logistical knowledge and practices in the deep shadows created by the system of containerization itself.⁸⁶

In relation to the historic problems of dockside pilfering, the introduction of containers certainly reduced some opportunities for theft, but precisely because all such systems are open to subversion, their introduction also increased opportunities for other forms of illegality. As noted earlier, given that the profitability of container shipping depends on the uninterrupted and seamless flow of containers through the system, they constitute not simply a very efficient system of distribution but also a highly effective mode of concealment. As Martin observes, “the beauty of the door-to-door freight concert for smugglers is that, once the illegal container enters the logistics pipeline, it becomes almost invisible, amidst all the others circumnavigating the globe,” and to that extent “it offers the perfect space in which to conceal illegal practices.”⁸⁷

The growth in sanctioned forms of global commodity mobility cannot readily be disentangled from the movement of illicit things, as Gargi Bhattacharyya has

noted. Thus containers have unsurprisingly been “co-opted and utilised for a range of illegal practices such as tobacco and ... drug smuggling, alongside people trafficking.” To this extent, as Carolyn Nordstrom notes, “hidden in the sheer volume of trade, in the economics of immediacy, in the logistics of transport, and the contemporary revolutions in shipping lies the globalisation of the illegal.”⁸⁸

Thus, the infrastructure of containerization is relatively simple to infiltrate and pervert, and anyway, it transpires that current regulations only require some containers to be sealed. Furthermore, the seals themselves are relatively easy to open if you have the right tools and any such tampering is not easily ascertained without a more careful visual checking of seals than is normally possible in the time allowed for the container’s passage through the docks. Even if you do not have the tools, it is, as Nordstrom points out, relatively simple to change the container’s identity with the help of some spray paint, scissors, and a paper stencil.⁸⁹ Thus, despite the imagery of securitization with which it is associated, the world of containers is in fact, rather more porous than it might appear.

Repurposing the Box ...

Evidently, the box has come to perform widely varying functions in different cultural contexts. When you look closely, its superficial standardization fragments into a multiplicity of elements – for the container is, in the end, just that: a box which can contain anything and can be used for a variety of unforeseen purposes in its differential appropriation by architects, shopowners, artists, drug dealers, migrants, and pirates. If the shipping container is “commonly argued to have led to the rationalisation of global trade [it] has also allowed the production of art, crime [and], housing.”⁹⁰

Within the art world, containers have been utilized for a variety of purposes.⁹¹ When the Polish artist Miroslav Balka installed an empty container box in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern Gallery in London in 2009, the “High Art” context of its installation meant that rather than being addressed as a functional object it was variously interpreted as symbolizing industrialization, sensory deprivation, and imprisonment.⁹² In addition to the work of the “container artist” Yvan Salomone discussed earlier,⁹³ Ashley Bickerton’s work has featured commercial crates and packing cases with all the formal attributes of shipping cargoes, emblazoned not with the familiar names of MAERSK or HANJIN but with his own ironic logos, in the vocabulary of aesthetics, intended to point up the parallels between the modes of circulation of industrial commodities and those of the rarified objects of the art world.⁹⁴

While the container box was designed for mobility it can, of course, be fixed, immobilized, and turned into a dwelling place. It can become an office space, a grocery shop, a garage, or in other cases a place of refuge or hide-away.⁹⁵ It can

thus be transformed into a variety of forms of living accommodation or work-space – for example, as emergency housing (as in New Orleans, after hurricane Katrina). In the First World, it increasingly provides the basic building block for a variety of types of modular architecture, providing housing for students and young and poor people in Western cities.

In London, the Trinity Buoy Wharf project, “Container City,” was set up as early as 2001 in London’s former docklands as a complex of studio and work-spaces made from recycled shipping containers. In subsequent years the project has expanded as the University of East London opened Fine Art studios, and it now extends to a five-story high modular housing system. The summer of 2011 saw the construction of London’s first “pop-up” shopping mall, “Boxpark,” constructed out of 60 container units, and many similar ones elsewhere have followed in its wake. In other situations containers have used to provide both military and prison facilities in many locations (including, famously, the British army’s Camp Bastion in Afghanistan and the US Camp Delta in Guantánamo Bay).

The box also functions as the routine basis of self-build forms of vernacular architecture in the Third World – such as that of the *gecekondu* areas of Istanbul or of the parts of Lagos explored by Rem Koolhaas and his colleagues.⁹⁶ It provided the physical basis for what was, at one stage, the “largest market” in the world – the “Seventh-Kilometre” market on the airport road outside Odessa in the Ukraine, which was composed entirely of discarded containers and known locally as the “Field of Wonders.” That market, “part Third World bazaar, part post-Soviet Wal-Mart,” was set up when the Soviet city fathers of Odessa expelled the pioneer free-market from within the city walls to what had previously been a garbage dump, only to see it rapidly expand to a previously unimagined scale.⁹⁷ All over Africa, containers can be found now repurposed for new uses – sometimes in the form of accommodation for schools, health centers, or ICT installations; sometimes, when these (mainly Aid-driven) projects die, simply as metal hulks squatted in by local inhabitants; sometimes adopted for shelter by local wildlife.⁹⁸

In conclusion, here I turn to another articulation of one mode of mobility with another, in this case illegal migration and shipping. If one unforeseen transformation of the container box is from a technology of mobility to one of habitation, another concerns its routine repurposing for the (illegal) transport of people rather than of commodities. In some cases this involves the “desperate passengers” who are the clients of the Chinese Snakehead gangs, paying up to US\$60,000 each to be smuggled by container into the United States as part of a billion-dollar industry.⁹⁹ As Michael Winterbottom’s 2002 film *In This World* demonstrates, the box is a key technology for illegal flows of migration, allowing those concealed at great (and sometimes fatal) risk within to pass seamlessly from the back of a lorry or train into the hold of a ship as they transgress a number of frontiers.¹⁰⁰ On occasion, as noted earlier, in Chapter 7,

in relation to Roberto Saviano's account, containers also provide the medium for the illegal transport of the bodies of the dead, as in the case of Chinese migrants who pay to have their corpses frozen for illegal transportation back to China for burial in their home village.¹⁰¹ The container box's connection with people smuggling has also acquired a rich resonance within popular culture. In a cruel parody of contemporary reality TV shows, such as *Big Brother*, in which the public are invited to "vote out" disliked contestants from the program, the German conceptual artist Christoph Schlingensief used shipping containers to stage a conceptual art event outside the City Hall in Vienna, called "Please Love Austria (Foreigners Out!)." In the show, 12 real asylum seekers lived in container boxes under constant CCTV scrutiny while ostensibly competing for residency visas, and the public were invited to vote the ones they disliked out of the country rather than simply, as in the case of the original TV version, off the show. Meanwhile, Schlingensief himself acted as "ringmaster," parading up and down in the square with a loudspeaker, keeping up public enthusiasm for the competition and announcing that the winner could look forward to "a cash prize and the prospect, depending on the availability of volunteers, of Austrian citizenship through marriage."¹⁰² Here, I end with this deliberately shocking example – involving this parodic public subversion of the container's usually hidden role in people-smuggling. By this means we return to the concerns of my earlier work *Home Territories* on the role of various types of "purification rituals" for the removal of "matter" (or in this case) people "out of place" from the sacred territories of the "homeland." I began that earlier book with Fernand Braudel's claim that "the question of boundaries is the first to be encountered; from it all others flow." It seems equally fitting, the processes of globalization and containerization notwithstanding, that I now close this book with that same observation: if anything, the processes of mobility with which this book has been concerned have only served to exacerbate the crucial importance of border controls.¹⁰³

Notes

1 For a fictional account of life on board a tramp steamer in the early twentieth century, sailing under a "flag of convenience," see B. Traven's classic novel *The Death Ship*, Sphere Books 1967 (first published in 1926). For contemporary documentation of this same phenomenon, see William Langewiesche's account of shipping on the high seas as operating in an anarchic space in which few laws or regulations hold good, in W. Langewiesche (2004) *The Outlaw Sea: Chaos and Crime on the World's Oceans*, Granta Books.

2 S. Kumar and J. Hoffman (2002) Globalisation the Maritime Nexus, in C. Grammenos, *The Handbook of Maritime Economics and Business*, Lloyd's, p. 36.

3 Filipinos alone make up more than a third of all crews worldwide, being prized for their combination of being particularly cheap to hire while speaking relatively good English compared with other sources of cheap labor. The question of how much English even the officer class speak is also a matter of some concern – the journalist Rose George reported herself to be astounded at how little English one of the officers on her ship could read or speak – which she found troubling, given the number of occasions on which his duties required him to understand English words in written or spoken form. R. George – personal interview 2010; see also R. George (2013) *Deep Sea and Foreign Going*, Portobello Press, pp. 9, 22.

4 A. Sekula (1995) *Fish Story*, Richter Verlag.

5 Joseph Bonney (2010) Carriers Move Full Speed into Slow Steaming, *Journal of Commerce Online* (January 12). Available online at <http://www.joc.com/maritime/carriers-move-full-speed-slow-steaming> (accessed November 7, 2016).

6 George, *Deep Sea*, pp. 4; 97; cf. Edgerton earlier on the relative stasis of contemporary rates of mobility, compared with the radical increases of speed in the nineteenth century.

7 Sekula, *Fish Story*, p. 50; A. Sekula (2006) *The Lottery of the Sea*, Icarus Films. As Anyaa Anim-Addo, William Hasty, and Kimberley Peters note, the relative neglect of ships and shipping continues even within studies of “new mobility,” see A. Anim-Addo, W. Hasty, K. Peters (2014) The Mobilities of Ships and Shipped Mobilities, *Mobilities* 9 (3).

8 S. Murray (2007) *Moveable Feasts: The Incredible Journey of Things We Eat*, Aurum Books.

9 George, *Deep Sea*, p. 4.

10 A. Sekula and N. Burch ‘The Forgotten Space’ *New Left Review* 69 May–June 2011.

11 George, *Deep Sea*, p. 18; B. Cudahy (2006) *Box Boats*, Fordham University Press; M. Levinson (2006) *The Box*, Princeton University Press; A. Donovan and J. Bonney (2006) *The Box That Changed the World*, Commonwealth Business Media.

12 Levinson, *Box*, p. 268. Containers transport not just finished goods but also the components of the new system of dispersed global production known as “intermediate goods” – factory inputs that have been partially processed in one place and will be “finished” elsewhere.

13 J.-P. Rodrigue, C. Comtois, and B. Slack (2006) *The Geography of Transport Systems*, Routledge, p. 115.

14 J.-P. Rodrigue and M. Browne (2008) International Maritime Freight Movements, in R. Knowles, J. Shaw, and I. Docherty (eds.), *Transport Geographies*, Blackwell, pp. 176–177.

15 Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, p. 105.

16 Malcolm McLean, quoted in Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, p. 70.

17 To take one example, before containerization, a standing joke in the port of New York was that a docker's wages were \$20 a day and all the whisky you could carry home. Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, pp. xix, 111.

18 Cf. M. Rosenstein, quoted in Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, p. 51. For a fascinating account of one of the precursors of "containerization" systems of transport, based on the barrel ("the perfect marriage between high art and utilitarian function ... beauty and strength") see Murray, *Moveable Feasts*, Ch. 8.

19 McLean quoted in Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, p. 244.

20 W. Gibson (2008) *Spook Country*, Penguin Books, pp. 294, 176.

21 P. Farley and M. Symmons Roberts (2011) *Edgelands*, Jonathan Cape.

22 Such a glimpse into the mysterious contents of one box alone is, by definition, merely the result of this exceptional accident. However, by way of metacommentary on this situation, in Istanbul in 2012, the German art collective "Gonzoconsult" in collaboration with Turkish conceptual artists launched a project called "Glass-boating the Bosphorus." This project, designed to highlight the scale of import of mass-produced items from the Far East into Europe, featured seven floating glass container boxes filled with brand-new goods (mainly plastic toys, kitsch items, and cheap knick-knacks), which were ferried across the Bosphorus in an attempt to render visible the unsustainable sociological and ecological dimensions of this form of (usually "invisible") trade.

23 B. Holmes (2011) Do Containers Dream of Electric People, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im)Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, p. 40.

24 Cf. Ned Rossiter (2012) The Logistical City. Available online at nedrossiter.org (accessed November 14, 2016).

25 S. Sandhu (2013) How the Modern World Works, *The Guardian* (September 14).

26 See Chapter 1.

27 On the question of the identification of the motor car, the TV set, and the fridge as the "superlative objects of the 'modern age'" cf. R. Barthes (1972) *Mythologies*, Paladin; K. Ross (1996) *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, MIT Press. For the correlative Japanese icons, see S. Yoshimi (1999) Made in Japan, *Media, Culture and Society* 21 (20).

28 There have now also been a number of "Container Art" exhibitions – e.g., at Kaohsiung in Taiwan in 2007 and in Genova, in Italy in 2008 – which have offered critical commentary on the place of the container within the economy and ecology of the contemporary world. There is even an artist, Yvan Salomone, whose work focusses exclusively on the representation of container ports – see T. Dean and J. Miller (2005) *Place*, Thames and Hudson, pp. 166–167.

29 Alan Sekula, verbal contribution to discussion at "The Travelling Box: Containers as a Global Icon of our Era," University of California Santa Barbara Conference, November 2007.

30 Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, pp. xxiii, 211.

31 Full details of the box's travels, as well as short reports and videos, can be found at the Web address in the subheading (accessed November 7, 2016). In the narrative account given in this section, I rely heavily on the various reports on the project posted on the BBC Web site by, among others: Jeremy Hillman, Hugh Pym, Nils Blyth (all at the BBC's London offices); Christian Frazer (Middle East Correspondent); Jonathon Gordon (Singapore); Quentin Somerville and Chris Hogg (Shanghai); Matt Frei (Los Angeles); Greg Ward (North American Correspondent); Gary Duffy (San Paolo); and Roland Buerk (Tokyo). This account also draws on an interview conducted as the project was nearing its conclusion in September 2009 with Jeremy Hillman, who, as Head of BBC Business News, conceived the original idea and managed it throughout.

32 See also M. Wark (2002) *Dispositions*, Salt Publishing in which McKenzie Wark traces the narrative of his own movements over a nine-month period, not only through time but across space (using a personal GPS device), which offers an interesting parallel to the BBC project.

33 M. Callon and B. Latour (1981) Unscrewing the Big Leviathan, in K. Knorr-Cetina and A. V. Cicourel (eds.), *Advances in Social Theory*, Routledge, p. 8.

34 As noted earlier, pilfering was such a serious problem in the previous era of "break-bulk" loose cargo transportation that the savings enabled by containerization of cargo were in fact, a substantial motivating force in the abandonment of the old, more vulnerable methods of shipment. Cf. also the comments on this issue by R. George's interviewees quoted later in note 85.

35 See A. Appadurai (1997) *Modernity at Large*, University of Minnesota Press on the potential disjunctures between "ethnoscapes" and "financescapes."

36 Cf. downturns in globalization in previous eras – H. Jones (2001) *The End of Globalization: Lessons from the Great Depression*, Harvard University Press.

37 Cf. Hillman's comment that "The only reservation came from the Head of the BBC's Six o'clock News because, traditionally, they don't do long-running stories like that – and looking back, the project has been the least successful on those traditional, bespoke bulletins. It's never going to be 'Big News,' it's more of an unwinding feature – so there's always been more pressing, immediate stuff to knock it off the air, on the 6 and 10 pm news bulletins ... Of course, when it appears on one of the main news bulletins we knew that, at that moment, it went up to being the third most popular story on the whole website." (D.M. personal interview).

38 F. Kittler (1999) *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford University Press, pp. 1–2.

39 Cf. W. Boddy (2008) The Last Format War, in J. Bennett and Tom Brown (eds.), *Film and Television after DVD*, Routledge.

40 A. Barry (2001) *Political Machines*, Athlone Press.

41 J. Agar (2013) *Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone*, Icon Books, p.155.

42 Agar, *Constant Touch*, p. 153.

43 M. Fuller (2007) *Media Ecologies*, Leonardo Books.

44 Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, pp. 93–95, 97, 127; cf. also G. Bowker and S. Leigh Starr (eds.) (2000), *Sorting Things Out*, MIT Press.

45 Murray, *Moveable Feasts*, p. 44.

46 Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, p. 74.

47 Ned Rossiter, Logistical City.

48 A. Galloway (2004) *Protocol: How Control Persists after Decentralization*, MIT Press.

49 Ned Rossiter, Logistical City.

50 B. Neilson and N. Rossiter (2010) Still Waiting, Still Moving, in David Bissell and Gillian Fuller (eds.), *Stillness in a Mobile World*, Routledge; Barry, *Political Machines*, p. 63. If the key to efficient shipping lay in standardizing the unit of shipment, different companies had opted for different sized standards. While the American Federal Maritime Board had endorsed the principle of standardized containers by 1958, it was 1961 before the American Standards Association established the cross-industry standards, later endorsed by the International Organization for Standardization (in 1965), which are today enshrined in the basic forms of the TEU (the Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit) and the FEU (the Forty-Foot Equivalent Unit), which still dominate the industry.

51 M. Parker (2013) Containerisation: Moving Things and Boxing Ideas, *Mobilities* 8 (3).

52 For a well-developed outline of this thesis, see S. Winchester (2015) *Pacific: The Ocean of the Future*, Harper Collins.

53 Rodrigue, Comtois, and Slack, *Geography of Transport Systems*, p. 247.

54 Levinson, quoted in O. Burkeman 'The Shipping News' *The Guardian* (January 27).

55 R. Neate (2013) Giants of the Sea Force Ports to Grow, *The Guardian* (March 7); M. Odell and J. Pickford (2013) Giants of the Sea Drive Port Expansion, *Financial Times* (June 17).

56 Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, p. 209.

57 Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, pp. 25–27, 46, 172–173.

58 B. Winston (2006) *Media, Technology and Society*, Routledge.

59 Neilson and Rossiter, Still Waiting.

60 Holmes, Do Containers Dream, pp. 32, 35–36, 36–37.

61 Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, pp. 204, 197–198.

62 W. Nijenhuis, Exit City, in J. Seijdel (ed.), *(Im)Mobility*, NAI Publishers SKOR, p. 71.

63 Rodrigue, Comtois, and Slack, *Geography of Transport Systems*, pp. 157, 161.

64 See Introduction.

65 Rodrigue, Comtois, and Slack, *Geography of Transport Systems*, pp. 169, 115.

66 O. Mongin (2012) Mega-Ports: On the New Geography of Containerisation, *Eurozine* (July 27). Online at <http://eurozine.com/articles/2012-07-27-mongin-en.html> (accessed on November 15, 2016).

67 P. Panayides (2006) Maritime logistics and Global Supply Chains, *Maritime Economics and Logistics*, 8, 3–18 quoted in Rodrigue and Browne, *International Maritime Freight Movements*, p. 172.

68 P. Virilio, (2010) Le littoral, le dernière frontière, *Esprit* (December), quoted in Mongin, *Mega-Ports*.

69 G. Lovink and N. Rossiter (2014) Organised Networks. Online at Ned Rossiter.org (accessed November 7, 2016); cf. also A. Mattelart (1996) *The Invention of Communication*, University of Minnesota Press on this re Foucault.

70 Neilson and Rossiter, *Still Waiting*.

71 Neilson and Rossiter, *Still Waiting*; cf. Gibson *Spook*, where the plot is based on the possibilities opened up by criminal subversion of global ship monitoring systems such as the (in this case, fictional) “Predictive Analysis for Naval Deployment Activities” (PANDA), which, we are told, tracks “behavioural patterns of commercial vessels local to global; their routes; routine detours ... [and so on, so that] ... if a ship that always travels between Malaysia and Japan turns up in the Indian Ocean PANDA notices” pp. 258–259.

72 Melinda Cooper quoted in Neilson and Rossiter, *Still Waiting*, p. 8.

73 M. Levinson (2008) Freight Pain: The Rise and Fall of Globalisation, *Foreign Affairs* 87 (6), 133–140.

74 N. Hopkins (2012) Outgunned Pirates Who Can Hardly Believe Their Luck, *The Guardian* (May 9). As we see from this example, the path of globalization can never be assumed to run smooth: even the decreases in journey times facilitated by a nineteenth-century invention such as the Suez Canal cannot be assumed to hold good for the future.

75 George, *Deep Sea*, 124, 129, 131.

76 George, *Deep Sea*, 142, 150. For an effective fictional dramatization of what a ship hijacking is actually like, see Tobias Lindholm’s 2012 film *The Hijacking*, produced by Magnolia Pictures. For the melodramatic Hollywood version, starring Tom Hanks, see Paul Greengrass (2013) *Captain Phillips*, Sony Pictures. For a well-informed documentary treatment, see Thymaya Payne (2013) *Stolen Seas*, Goldcrest Films. See also J. Bahadur (2011) *Deadly Waters: Inside the Hidden World of Somali Pirates*, Profile Books. In the subsequent period, Western warships sent to police the waters off Somalia have had considerable success in driving the pirates away (or at least further off shore). Unfortunately this has also resulted in the return of flotillas of illegal fishing boats (principally from Yemen, Iran, and South Korea) – as a result of which, the economic pressures on poor Somalis unable to make a living by any other method are forcing many of them to consider a return to piracy – see C. Stewart (2015) *Illegal Fishing*

Fleets Plunder Somalia's Seas, as Fears Grow that Pirates are Set to Return, *The Observer* (November 1).

77 Parker, Containerisation, 368, 373. For a relatively uncritical exposition of the joys of globalization, see T. Friedman (2005) *The World is Flat*, Farrar Strauss and Giroux.

78 Parker, Containerisation, 369, 374, 383; cf. also J. Urry (2007) *Mobilities*, Polity Press.

79 John D. McCown, Trailer Bridge Inc. and James J. Devine, New York Container International, quoted in Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, pp. 260, 254.

80 Parker, Containerisation, 378, 377.

81 Steven E. Flynn Council on Foreign Relations quoted in Donovan and Bonney, *Box*, p. 217.

82 George, *Deep Sea*, p. 43.

83 Cf. M. Glenny (2009) *McMafia: Seriously Organised Crime*, Vintage Books.

84 Cf. T. Jones (2006) Short Cuts, *London Review of Books* 28 (3) (February 2). On the broader question of the global flow of "Bads" cf. Glenny, *McMafia*.

85 George, *Deep Sea*, p. 43; personal interview with R. George by D.M., 2009.

86 C. Martin (2016) *Shipping Container*, Bloomsbury Academic, p. 85; M. de Certeau (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press 1984.

87 Martin, *Shipping Container*, p. 85.

88 G. Bhattacharyya (2005) *The Illicit Movement of People and Things*, Pluto Press; Martin, *Shipping Container*, p. 76; C. Nordstrom (2007) *Global Outlaws: Crime, Money and Power in the Contemporary World*, University of California Press, p. 158. On this point see also Glenny, *McMafia*.

89 Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws* p. 85, quoted in Martin, *Shipping Container*, p. 88.

90 Parker, Containerisation, 385, 369.

91 Dick Hebdige and Kim Yosuda collaborated at UCSB in 2006–2007 using abandoned container boxes from the port of Los Angeles for their students to "customize," both as studio spaces and as site-specific sculptural exhibits. In the international art world, documentation of the Kuohsiung and Genova container art exhibitions can be found at *container.khcc.gov.tw* and *containerart.org/eng/ecosystems_genova* respectively (accessed November 7, 2016).

92 Parker, Containerisation, 368.

93 Cf. Dean and Millar, *Place*.

94 I. Rogoff (2000) *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, Routledge, pp. 60–63.

95 Cf. Mongin, *Mega-Ports*.

96 Cf. R. Koolhaas (ed.) (2004) *Mutations*, ACTAR; D. Morley (2007) Istanbul Tales, *Soundings* 37.

97 S.L. Myers (2006) Ukrainian Mall Not for the Dainty, *International Herald Tribune* (May 19).

98 Cf. P. Theroux (2003) *Dark Star Safari*, Penguin.

99 Parker, Containerisation, 378.

100 Cf. Mongin, Mega-Ports.

101 R. Saviano (2007) *Gomorrah*, Pan Books offers this account in his story of illegal trade in the port of Naples; see also the US production company Home Box Office's television series *The Wire* (particularly Episode 1 of Series 2 (2002)), for a fictional representation of the (sometimes fatal) dangers of smuggling people inside containers designed for inanimate objects.

102 Cf. T.J. Demos (2013) *The Migrant Image*, Duje University Press, p. 15; cf. also www.schlingensief.com (accessed November 15, 2016).

103 [wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreigners_out!_Schlingensiefs_Container](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreigners_out!_Schlingensiefs_Container). See also the work of Gulsel Ozkan, which also dramatizes the use of containers in people smuggling, in the *Global-is(ol)ation* project. See D. Morley (2000) *Home Territories*, p. ix.

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